University of Alberta

In-Scope Supervisors: Working and Learning In-Between

by

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Abstract

This study explored the work and work-related learning experiences of six in-scope supervisors; namely, supervisors who belong to the same collective bargaining unit as rank-and-file workers. Two loosely structured group interviews were used to collect most of the research data, which was analyzed from both an interpretive and critical perspective. A number of tensions and contradictions associated with the position of in-scope supervision were found. The study also found that the participants' work identities were shaped by their histories as former rank-and-file workers and by their job-related functions. Their histories also shaped their relationships with workers, as did their collective bargaining unit status. The participants' learning was predominately informal and incidental, embedded in other activities and in their relationships. It was also diverse and complex. While the understandings the participants gained of their workplace were potentially powerful, their learning tended to reproduce the systems in which they worked.

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There are several people whose support and encouragement were invaluable to me in completing this thesis. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tara Fenwick, for her guidance and patience, and for knowing exactly when I needed that little extra push to move on to the next stage. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Alison Taylor and Dr. Bruce Spencer. I am grateful to my friends, family, classmates and co-workers, particularly Wendy Coffin, for giving me the time, space and words of encouragement I needed. To the six individuals who participated in this study, I am forever in your debt. And finally to my husband, Ron Patterson – your strength, wisdom and kindness I rely on everyday.

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Chapter 1
Why In-Scope Supervision? Origins, Context and Significance of the Research

When I would tell people, in response to their questions about the subject of my Master's thesis, that I was exploring the experiences of in-scope supervisors, a common reaction I would receive was a look of puzzlement. I would respond by explaining that in-scope supervisors are members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers they supervise. The look of puzzlement would often change to a look of curiosity, either because the person to whom I was speaking was not aware that there are supervisors who are in-scope or, if they were aware, had not thought about the unique and inherently conflicting position in-scope supervisors inhabit. Indeed, some of the in-scope supervisors who took part in my study told me that until I invited them to participate, they had never thought about what it meant for them to be members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers they supervised.

Like unionized rank-and-file workers, in-scope supervisors are members of two organizations – their employer and their union – with differing and often conflicting ideologies. Some of the concepts generally associated with "managerialism" include competition, individualism, and management control and flexibility (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Some of the concepts generally associated with a union ideology include equity, collectivity, and workplace democracy (Martin, 1995; Yates, 1998). Differences between union and management ideology can be seen in the different approaches they tend to take on a variety of work-related issues. For example, from a traditional management perspective "the way to motivate employees and achieve greater productivity is by monetarily rewarding individual effort" (Colosi and Berkeley, 1986, p. 22). From a union perspective, paying workers who do similar jobs at different rates is "divisive": "While a slight exception may be made for some length-of-service bonus that rewards loyalty, basically everyone should be paid the

same for doing the same amount of work" (p. 22). Struggles between management and unions within the workplace are reflective of a larger historical struggle between capital and labour, which Foley (1999c) identifies as one of the chief features of capitalist political economy; that is, "a constant struggle over the conception and management of work, resulting in diverse and changing accommodations or modes of regulation" (p. 2).

Unlike rank-and-file workers, however, in-scope supervisors are expected to represent the interests of management in labour relations – interests that can and often do conflict with the interests of rank-and-file workers and the unions that represent them. This study explores how their unique location shapes in-scope supervisors' everyday learning and identity.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into eight sections, describing how I came to this study, the purpose of the research, definitions and context of the study, my approach, the significance of the research, delimitations, and limitations.

Locating myself as the researcher

I bring to this research a strong commitment to the labour movement and support for the union concept. This commitment is embedded in my experience growing up in a family whose economic status might be described as "working class." According to the second edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, the classical definition of working class, which derives from Marx, is "that class which must sell its labour-power in order to survive" (Marshall, 1998, p. 709). Marshall claims that this is no longer a satisfactory definition and distinguishes the "working class" from other workers through details of exchange and position.

> First, in terms of market situation, the working class is defined by the fact that it sells its labour-power in discrete amounts of time (paid by the hour) or output (piecework) in return for a wage. In the case of work situation, the working class comprises those who are in an

> entirely subordinate role, such that this is a key feature of their labour contract. (p. 709)

I am the youngest of 11 children. My mother did not work outside of the home until I started school, while my father worked in a labouring job for over 40 years. Even though the job he held was a working class job, he earned a decent enough wage, as well as benefits, to provide for the needs of our family. At some point in my life I connected this with the fact that his job was unionized. Research studies have shown that unionized workers typically enjoy higher wages and better benefits than their nonunionized counterparts (Yates, 1998, p. 17). According to Fang and Verma (2002), the overall union wage premium in 1999 was 14.3% before being adjusted for differences in individual, job, workplace, industry and regional characteristics. After adjusting for these differences, they estimated the union wage premium at 7.7%. According to Statistics Canada (2004), the average hourly wage for full-time unionized workers in 2003 was $21.51 compared to $18.09 for nonunionized workers, while the part-time hourly wage was $18.28 for unionized workers versus $11.03 for nonunionized workers (p. 64).

But this economic advantage of union membership is only one reason why I support the labour movement's efforts to organize workers. I also align myself ideologically with the labour movement's fight for justice and equality. The labour movement in Canada has "frequently aspired to speak on behalf of all workers and to promote a broad program of social reform…It has been particularly concerned with confronting the state over larger issues that affect many aspects of workers' lives: education, health, housing, environment, and so on" (Heron, 1996, p. xi). Martin (1995) argues that the involvement of Canadian unions "in a range of public coalitions on issues from child care to employment equity has carried union leaders and union resources into the broader struggle against racism and sexism" (p. 33).

Perhaps the primary reason why I support unionization is because I believe that unions play an important role "in democratising work relations by giving a voice to the less powerful" (Spencer, 2001, p.38). Within nonunionized workplaces, "the employer has great latitude in the running of the operation and direction of its employees. As long as the employer is in compliance with applicable statutes, the style of decision making may be unilateral…the employer may treat employees as choice dictates" (Colosi and Eliot, 1986, p. 13). Within unionized workplaces, workers collectively have a voice in at least some of the decisions that affect their lives. Thus, unionization can result in a shift in power relations in the workplace. That being said, even in unionized workplaces the scales of power are tipped in favour of management.

> While employees can work through their union to challenge management power, their collective agreements explicitly accept the management right to control the work environment and the workforce. The remainder of the document, however lengthy, merely specifies the exceptions to management rule. On those points in which the contract is silent, management rights govern. This means that residual power or unanticipated incidents revert in principle to the benefit of management. (Martin, 1995, p. 37)

In addition to a commitment to unionization, I came to this research study with approximately 15 years experience as a supervisor in a unionized workplace. The number of employees I supervised over those years is well over one hundred and included both part-time and full-time staff. Only the full-time staff I have supervised belonged to a union. At the time of this study, I supervised five full-time unionized workers, one of whom was a member of the same collective bargaining unit to which I belonged.

My experience has taught me that the position of supervisor is complex. It is at times rewarding and at other times frustrating. The majority of my experience has been very positive, and for that I consider myself fortunate. However, I had one very

distressing experience, which involved a grievance filed by someone I had supervised. While the grievance was denied, the experience caused me to question whether or not I wanted to continue being a supervisor. Perhaps surprisingly to some, it did not lead me to question my support for the union concept. The union involved in my case had a commitment to represent the interests of one of their members, and I was not one of their members. But what if I had been? What if the employee who had filed the grievance and I had been members of the same collective bargaining unit? Those are the sorts of questions that were the impetus for this research study.

As I reflected upon my experience, I began to think about some of the tensions and contradictions that in-scope supervisors might experience. For example, if an in-scope supervisor wanted to become active in the union, would this harm her or his chances to advance within the organization because she or he might be perceived by management as siding with the union against the employer? If a worker supervised by an in-scope supervisor filed a grievance with the union about an action taken by the supervisor, would the union provide any support to the supervisor? In the case of a major conflict between management and the union, such as a strike, with whom would an in-scope supervisor side? Would she or he heed the union's request not to cross the picket line or support management's efforts to keep operations running by doing the jobs of workers out on strike? And what do in-scope supervisors learn in these situations? That is, how do these experiences affect their changing knowledge, capabilities, and sense of identity?

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research study was to understand in-scope supervisors' experiences of being in leadership positions within the workplace, while at the same time being members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers whom they

supervised. It began with an exploration of in-scope supervisors' experiences as narrated by them, and then examined those narratives from both an interpretive and critical perspective. The primary research question that guided the study is: **What are the work and work-related learning experiences of in-scope supervisors?** Secondary questions were:

- What tensions and contradictions do in-scope supervisors experience and what are the sources of those tensions and contradictions?
- Do in-scope supervisors identify more with management or with the workers they supervise?
- Do in-scope supervisors believe their jobs would be easier if they were out of scope (either not unionized or members of a union different from the one to which rank-and-file workers belong)?
- In what ways do in-scope supervisors change when they move from a rank-and-file position to a supervisory position?

Definitions and Context

Throughout this thesis, I use the term "in-scope supervisor" to refer to a supervisor who is a member of the same collective bargaining unit as the employees she or he supervises. I define "supervisor" as an employee of an organization who directs the work of employees below her or him in the organizational hierarchy (i.e., rank-and-file workers) and who reports to management. Collective bargaining refers to "that process through which representatives of employees and management have an opportunity to exchange promises about their future relationship" (Colosi and Berkeley, 1986, p. 116). The end product of this process is a collective agreement. The group of employees to whom a specific collective agreement applies is called the collective bargaining unit.

It is important to note that within a single workplace there may be more than one union representing employees, and that in workplaces where the same union represents all employees there may be more than one collective bargaining unit. Situations exist where supervisors are union members but are represented either by a different union than the workers they supervise or, if represented by the same union, are in a different collective bargaining unit. These supervisors are not in-scope and thus should not be viewed as subjects of this study.

Despite considerable effort, I was unable to locate any statistical information on the number of in-scope supervisors in Canada. It seems safe to assume, however, that in-scope supervisors are more prevalent in the public sector than in the private sector given the significantly higher rate of unionization within the public sector. According to Statistics Canada (2004), the unionization rate for 2004 was 72% within the public sector compared to 18.2% within the private sector (p. 62). Based on my personal experience and conversations with others who work in the public sector (e.g. municipal, provincial and federal civil services, educational institutions, health care facilities), I have learned that many front-line public sector supervisors are not only unionized but are members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers whom they supervise.

In the Province of Alberta, which was the site for this study, public sector employees fall within the jurisdiction of the *Public Service Employee Relations Act (PSERA)*. Section 12 (1) of the *PSERA* (2000) states that any individual "who has or exercises managerial duties and responsibilities in relation to one or more persons or in relation to the formulation, development or administration of policies or programs…shall not be included in a bargaining unit or any other unit for collective bargaining" (p. 11). The reason for excluding persons who exercise managerial duties

and responsibilities from collective bargaining is to avoid conflict of interest: "Employers must manage their staff. They must also negotiate and enforce collective agreements. To do this, employers need staff not subject to union influence. Excluding managers also helps unions operate free of employer influence" (Alberta Labour Relations Board, 2002, p. 1). Front-line supervisors are typically not involved in negotiating collective agreements, but their responsibilities do include enforcing collective agreements.

Section 12 (2) of the *PSERA* (2000) states that where "a question arises over whether a person is or is not included under subsection (1) and the matter cannot be settled by the employer and the bargaining unit, the question may be referred to the (Alberta Labour Relations) Board and its decision is final and binding (p. 12). Who does and who does not perform managerial functions is decided by the Board on a case-by-case basis: "Over the years, the Board has developed a general approach to assist in reaching a conclusion in a given case. Persons excluded because they exercise managerial functions generally fall into two categories: those who supervise and those who do not" (Alberta Labour Relations Board, 2002, p. 1). Within the literature on supervision of employees, supervisors are seen as part of management (see Chapter 2). Yet there are supervisors working within public sector organizations in Alberta who are members of the same collective bargaining units as the workers they supervise. The reason why they are not excluded from collective bargaining is because the Board does not consider "supervising others" as automatically meaning that a person exercises managerial responsibilities:

> The person must exercise effective control over the employees they supervise. At the least, they must make effective recommendations that materially affect the economic lives of employees. Effective recommendations are serious recommendations that are consistently acted upon. Effective recommendations are not merely input to or

> consultation about the decision-making process or the implementation of pre-determined policies. (p. 1)

A question that arises, then, is: Are in-scope supervisors part of management or not? Like managers, they hold a position of power within the organization stemming from their authority to delegate, control and evaluate the work of other workers. Within their unions, however, they do not possess the same positional power. Their position is one of equal status with all members. So in one context in-scope supervisors have authority over some workers, while in another they have no authority over those same workers. This makes the position of in-scope supervisor unique, threaded with multiple contradictions and tensions.

Approach to the Study

I chose a qualitative approach as the method for gathering and analysing the data for this study. To collect most of the data, I conducted two semi-structured group interviews, both with the same group of six participants. I chose group interviews over individual interviews because I felt that group discussion would trigger thoughts and comments by the research participants more so than would one-on-one conversations with me. I chose semi-structured interviews over structured interviews to provide space for the research participants to raise and discuss issues important to them while at the same time providing me with some structure. In order to stimulate the participants' thinking about the research topic and to promote discussion, I showed short scenes from four popular films during the first group interview. The scenes depicted interactions between supervisors and their superiors, peers and/or subordinates. The second group interview involved further discussion about the issues and themes arising from the first group interview.

I personally transcribed both group interviews and had the research participants review and comment on both transcripts. Data analysis involved coding

and categorizing the data according to methods described by Ely (1991). This interpretive analysis, which revealed issues and themes that arose from the two group interviews, was followed by a critical analysis of the data.

Significance of the research

Very little research has been done on the work and work-related learning experiences of in-scope supervisors and, as I'll show in Chapter 2, the vast majority of what little exists originates from the U.S. Thus, this study will contribute to the scant body of knowledge about public sector in-scope supervisors in Canada. It is significant from both an academic and practical perspective.

Workplace learning is a growing area of research within the academic discipline of adult education (Fenwick, 2001c). Foley (1999c) argues that there is little research in adult education literature, as well as in organizational learning and labour process literature, which "focuses on workers' autonomous learning in the capitalist labour process" (p.17). He further argues that this type of research has practical implications for adult educators because it reveals the importance of the workplace as a site for learning and shows that most learning that happens as people work is informal and incidental. He posits that this type of learning needs to be "the stuff of workplace education":

> What happens in workplaces and how people make sense of what happens must become the curriculum. Using critical and mobilising adult education pedagogies (Foley, 2000, 48-58), workers' experiences and learning must be put back to them so that they can analyse them collectively in an open-ended critical way. In doing so adult educators will be going back to the roots of modern working class and adult education movements. (p. 17)

The findings of this study may help adult educators who work with workers (e.g. labour or union educators, workplace educators) understand the beliefs and concerns of one group of workers – namely, in-scope supervisors – around which

critical education programs can be developed. This study will also contribute to an understanding of one group of workers' everyday lives in the workplace, which will be useful to those interested in studying workplace issues, including workplace learning.

Exploring the experiences of in-scope supervisors may also be beneficial from an organizational perspective. In-scope supervisors are members of the organizations with which they work and which represent them and other workers collectively. They have relationships with the workers they supervise, their managers, their peers, and others both within and outside of their workplaces. Their beliefs and actions impact their employers and unions. Examining their experiences may shed light on structural and other problems within those organizations and thus be helpful to managers and union officials. This study may benefit other in-scope supervisors by helping them to make sense of their experiences.

In sum, this study may be of use to workplace and union or labour educators, researchers interested in workplace issues, managers, union officials, and in-scope supervisors. Given the lack of research in this area, it may also stimulate interest that will lead to further research.

Delimitations

This research study is delimited in a number of ways. First, it focuses on in-scope supervisors working in the public sector in the Province of Alberta. I limited participation in the study to individuals with a minimum of six months experience in a supervisory position within an administrative, service or program unit. Precluded are other in-scope supervisors, such as those working in the private sector or located within other geographic locations. The experiences of those individuals may be quite

different from the target research group. Thus, I do not purport that the findings of this research study can or should be applied to all in-scope supervisors.

Second, I delimited the research group to six participants. Their views may not be representative of other in-scope supervisors in similar positions.

Finally, I conducted only two group interviews with the six participants, thereby delimiting the amount of data collected for the study.

Limitations

One of the potential limitations of this study is my experience and skill as a researcher. When I enrolled in the Master's program in Adult and Higher Education, one of the requirements was a research course. A "generic" course, which focused on research design, offered by the Department of Educational Policy Studies was recommended. Due to a change in the program, that course was replaced with one that focussed on reading research critically. To fulfil the program requirements, I took a course in action research. While I found this course interesting and beneficial, its focus was rather narrow. At times during this study, I felt limited by my lack of training in multiple methods for both collecting and analysing research data. I worried about how this limitation might threaten the validity of this study. To counter this threat, I read numerous books and articles on qualitative research, sought the guidance of my thesis supervisor, and dialogued with other researchers about their experiences conducting qualitative research.

A second potential limitation to this study is researcher bias. I strongly support workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively with their employer, and reject arguments against unionization. I take a critical perspective of the hierarchical and undemocratic structure of most workplaces in modern capitalist systems. These viewpoints shape the way I see myself, others and society. To mitigate the influences

of my biases in this study, I have attempted to remain attentive to them throughout the research process. I designed the study so that the research participants played a significant role in identifying and choosing the issues for the group discussions, I questioned my interpretations of the data in light of my viewpoints, and I make my beliefs and opinions explicit in the research report.

A third potential limitation to the study is my own experience as an in-scope supervisor. At first I saw being an in-scope supervisor myself as an advantage in terms of mutual understandings of the role between the research participants and myself as researcher. However, this situation also has the potential to limit the study if I assume and the participants assume that I have a better understanding of our shared experiences than I actually do.

A fourth limitation is the fact that I knew two of the participants personally prior to the study. They may have refrained from expressing opinions that conflicted with my views or may have felt compelled to express comments to support my views. I addressed this potential problem by encouraging the participants to express their views on a particular issue before I offered my own, and by refraining from asking judgemental questions.

A final limitation relates to the research participants' willingness to express their opinions and feelings openly and honestly, particularly if they believed their views conflict with what they perceived to be the consensus of the group. I addressed this potential problem by inviting the participants to add to the group discussion by writing additional comments they might have had on the meeting transcripts, and I assured them that these comments would be read by me only.

Thesis outline

The remainder of this thesis consists of five additional chapters. In the next chapter, I review the literature relevant to this study. The review reveals a dearth of research, particularly empirical research, on the experiences of in-scope supervisors. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods used to gather and analyze the data. I also present the theoretical framework of the study, and provide information about the research participants and the films used during the first group interview. The findings and my discussion of the findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The final chapter summarizes the study and includes recommendations for practice and further research, as well as personal reflections about the research.

Chapter 2
Supervisors and Unions: Existing Research

This chapter summarizes and comments on the literature related to the focus of this research study. An extensive search of the literature addressing trade union membership and organizational supervision revealed scant material focusing on experiences of in-scope supervisors. Those commentators who research and write about the topic tend to approach it from a public policy perspective. Specifically, they question whether supervisors should be included in or excluded from legislation that provides workers with statutory rights to form and join unions, and compels employers to negotiate with workers' unions. As experiences of in-scope supervisors are addressed only indirectly in some of the literature found, I turned to the literature on the broader topic of supervision of employees in a search for more sociological accounts of supervisors' experiences in the workplace.

This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) supervision of employees and (2) collective bargaining and supervisors. The review of the literature on supervision of employees is presented first. Although not exhaustive, it does provide useful information about the conditions, structures and expectations constituting supervisors' work, which is helpful background for a study exploring supervisors' actual experiences. The section on collective bargaining and supervisors follows and is divided into three subsections: (1) arguments in favour of extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors, (2) arguments in favour of prohibiting supervisors from unionizing, and (3) empirical studies on the impact of supervisor unionization.

Supervision of employees

Merriam and Simpson (1984) distinguish between two types of literature available on most topics: "theoretical or conceptual writing in the area and data-based research studies. The theoretical literature consists of writings that reflect an author's

experiences or opinions. Research studies are based on the collection and analysis of data gathered from sources (people, institutions, documents) extraneous to the author" (p. 32). Most of the literature on supervision of employees is of the first variety. Hill (1992), who offers one of the few data-based research studies on the topic, makes this very point: "Although countless articles and books offer counsel on how to develop managerial talent, few have been based on empirical research…Most are how-to manuals outlining the knowledge a manager needs about the content of managerial work" (p. 5).

In addition, much literature addressing employee supervision appears to be written by business/management academics, consultants and developers. The caution one should take from this is that a certain perspective dominates this literature. It is a perspective rooted in the discourse of management. A discourse "is a system of norms, values, and symbols (images and words) shaping particular beliefs and practices" (Fenwick, 2001c, p. 9). A discourse "determines what is 'the seeable and the sayable'" (Townley, 1994, p. 2). It excludes, or at least obscures, other perspectives and possibilities, and serves the interests of particular individuals and groups in our society. The discourse of management includes a set of assumptions about how the labour process should be managed; for example, that work should be planned and directed by managers and carried out by rank-and-file workers. Foley (1999b) writes that the discourse of management has become "the dominant way we have come to think about the organization of work" (p. 16). He refers to it as a "totalising discourse." Totalising discourses are "ways of thinking and acting which speak for and take over whole areas of human life" (p. 16). Totalising or dominant discourses are accepted by many as "truth" – as an explanation of the way things are

and ought to be. It is important to bear this point in mind when examining the literature on supervision of employees.[1]

Supervisors' location within the organizational hierarchy

Not surprisingly, then, there is considerable agreement within the literature on supervision of employees regarding, for example, the functions, roles and competencies of supervisors. For example, supervisors are consistently located at the bottom of the organization's pyramid-shaped management hierarchy – just below middle managers who are located between supervisors (also referred to as front-line or first-line supervisors or managers) and senior managers (Bulin, 1995; Jennings, 1993; Robbins, De Cenzo, Condie and Kondo, 2002; Rue and Byars, 1990; Sims, Veres, Jackson and Facteau, 2001; Timm, 1992). Thus, supervisors are identified as managers and are seen as performing the same functions as other managers: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The difference between supervisors, middle managers and senior managers in terms of these functions is seen as a reflection of their location within the management hierarchy: "First-line supervisors spend more time leading and less time planning" (Bulin, 1995, p. 9).

Additional factors are posited as distinguishing supervisors from other managers. For example, unlike other managers, supervisors do not manage other managers; they manage rank-and-file employees only (Robbins, et al., 2002, p. 7). They spend more time than other managers training and developing the employees they supervise (Robbins and De Cenzo, 1998, p. 16); therefore, they must "have a greater technical knowledge of their employees' jobs than that needed by middle- and top-level managers" (Sims, et al., 2001, p. 5). Supervisors interact daily with rank-

[1] It is also important to note that critical management studies literature (for example, see Alvesson and Willmott, 1996 and 2003) offers alternative management discourses but even these acknowledge that a "managerialist" (rational, hierarchical) paradigm dominates much current management theory and practice.

and-file employees. They are the link between rank-and-file employees and higher levels of management (Rue and Byars, 1990; Sims et al., 2001). They are expected to "integrate the goals of the organization with the goals of the employees" (Jennings, 1993, p. 8). When these goals conflict and "each side" demands that supervisors be "their advocate," they can experience stress and "confusion as to where their loyalties should lie" (Robbins et al., 2002, p. 14). Timm (1992) argues that supervisors experience pressures from both above and below: "Demands for group accomplishments will come down from above; pressures to help individuals overcome conflicts and work difficulties will come from people below" (p. 16). Finally, while they require the same skills sets as other managers – conceptual, human relations and technical – the skills sets supervisors require and utilize most are their technical and human relations skills (Jennings, 1993, p. 10; Timm, 1992, p. 8).

At the same time that supervisors are identified as being part of management rather than part of the rank-and-file workforce, there is an implicit recognition that the distinction between front-line supervisors and rank-and-file workers is blurred. There are a number of reasons offered for this. First, supervisors often perform some of the same tasks as the workers they supervise (Hill, 1992; Robbins and De Cenzo, 1998; Sims, et al., 2001). Second, others within the organization, particularly upper-level managers, often do not see or treat supervisors as managers: "This is reinforced when their decision-making authority is limited, when they're excluded from participating in upper-level decisions, and when they perform operating tasks alongside the same people they supervise" (Robbins and De Cenzo, 1998, p. 14). Third, the introduction of new management strategies (e.g. total quality management, team concept) has resulted in workers performing some of the same tasks as supervisors (Sims, et al., 2001) and gaining more input into and control over their work (Jennings, 1993, p. 11).

Despite acknowledging that the distinction between supervisory and rank-and-file workers is blurred, supervisors are still unequivocally identified as managers in the literature. For example, Robbins and De Cenzo (1998) argue that "the fact that they also engage in the same kind of work that their subordinates perform in no way changes their management status. In reality, they are still expected to perform the duties and responsibilities associated with the management process" (p. 8). Sims, et al. (2001) recommend that in order for new supervisors to be successful, they must first and foremost "recognize that they are part of management. This means that they must support the wishes of management…(even if they) disagree with those wishes…they must be loyal to the organization" (p. 38). There appears to me to be an inherent contradiction here. The goals of the organization are equated with the goals of management. Supervisors play a role in trying to realize those goals but not in terms of determining them. In this sense, how are they different from rank-and-file workers?

Promotion from within

A recurring theme in the literature on supervision of employees is that most supervisors are former "operative employees" (i.e., rank-and-file workers). The practice of recruiting supervisors from within is commonplace. Robbins, et al. (2002) provide reasons for this practice:

> Operative employees know the job, understand the organization and typically know the people they'll be supervising. And the organization knows a lot about the candidate. When management promotes 'one of their own,' it minimizes risk. Finally, and importantly, promoting from within acts as an employee motivator; it provides an incentive for employees to work hard and excel (p. 11).

However, this practice is seen as creating certain difficulties and challenges for the newly promoted supervisor. One challenge often cited is coming to terms with no longer being "one of the gang" (Rue and Byars, 1990, p. 10; Sims, et al., 2001, p.

27). Related to this is the difficulty of "giving orders to friends or former peers" (Bulin, 1995, p. 8).

Sims, et al. (2001) and Robbins, et al. (2002) argue that being promoted from a rank-and-file position to a supervisory position creates more anxiety than being promoted from one management position to another because new supervisors have no managerial experience. Robbins, et al. (2002) discuss the fears that group leaders being trained for supervisory positions had about their promotions at a manufacturing plant in Ontario. Their fears fell into four main areas: (1) reaction from co-workers; (2) disciplining workers; (3) decision making; and (4) meeting higher performance expectations (p. 14). The authors add that the training provided to these individuals prior to becoming supervisors helped to alleviate these fears: "Luckily, given the opportunity to prepare together for future supervisor roles and practice skills in a 'safe' environment, these group leaders realized that their fears were shared and therefore were not as frightening. As they practised the skills, they gained a sense of control and comfort" (p. 14).

Hill's (1992) study sought to describe the experience of becoming a supervisor or "first-line manager" from the new supervisor's perspective. She studied 19 new first-line managers in two research sites (a securities firm and a computer company) and one functional area (sales and marketing). All were former "individual contributors" (i.e., rank-and-file workers). The data was collected during the research participants' first year in their new role and included observations, as well as interviews with them and their subordinates, peers and superiors. Hill (1992) argues that most of the literature that addresses the transition from rank-and-file employee to front-line management focuses on task learning and relationship building. What she found was "the transition to management is not limited to acquiring competencies and

building relationships. Rather, it constitutes a profound transformation, as individuals learn to think, feel, and value as managers" (p. 5).

Impacts of organizational change

Another recurring theme in the literature on supervision of employees relates to how changes (e.g. technological change, the quality revolution, increasing diversity in the workforce, organizational restructuring) impact supervisors. For example, Robbins and De Cenzo (1998) argue that many organizations are changing the way they operate in order to reduce costs and improve productivity, and that many of the changes being implemented focus on the activities of rank-and-file workers: "As a result, supervisors have become increasingly important because they typically assume responsibility for introducing and implementing these change efforts at the operations level" (p. 16). The authors acknowledge that "traditional" supervisors (i.e., supervisor-as-boss) still exist, but that the expectations of supervisors are changing. They are expected to be trainers, advisors, mentors, facilitators, and coaches (p. 11).

Schlesinger (1982), who provides one of the few empirical studies on supervisors, looks at the impact of quality of work life projects on the supervisory role in seven U.S. plants that had implemented "participative work systems." The researchers used two methods for collecting data: interviews with managers, supervisors and workers, and observations of supervisory behaviour. They found that supervisors were generally dissatisfied with their role; that they experienced "high levels of ambiguity about their responsibilities and authority" (p. 2); that the skills and organizational support they felt were required to do their job were lacking; that the workers they supervised were recognized for the work they did, while supervisors generally did not receive recognition commensurate with the degree of effort they undertook in their job; and that their concerns were not readily attended to, unlike the

concerns of other groups within the organization. Jennings (1993) also discusses the impact that employee involvement programs have had on supervisors:

> In many instances, when a company implements such a program, supervisors may end up with an increased workload and an over-extended span of control. In addition, layers of management may be reduced, threatening a supervisor's job and career at the very time that workers are acquiring greater control within the organization. These radical changes often occur without supervisors' participation, and companies offer little, if any, training to help supervisors adjust to the new management style. (p. 11)

Discussion of unions

Discussion of unions within the employee supervision literature focuses on supervisors' roles in labour-management relations, how unionization impacts the supervisory process, and reasons why employees join unions.

- Supervisors' roles in labour relations

Supervisors' roles in labour relations are seen to include looking out for and reporting union organizing activities to management, serving as a resource person during contract negotiations, administering the collective agreement, and handling employee grievances. Rue and Byars (1990) state that supervisors have a dual responsibility in a unionized workplace: "The supervisor's first responsibility is, of course, to the employer. As a member of management, the supervisor must work toward achieving good productivity…the supervisor must also uphold the commitments of management under the contract" (p. 337). What is not addressed in the literature are the consequences of supervisors being union members themselves – whether in the same collective bargaining unit as the workers they supervise or in a separate unit – in terms of the roles they play in labour relations, and their responsibility to management and to their union.

- Impact of unionization

Jennings (1993) argues that management's autonomous control of the workplace is significantly diminished by unionization and that supervisors are particularly affected because of their day-to-day interaction with union members: "Many supervisory decisions have to conform to the labor-management contract" (p. 321). There is an underlying assumption that unionization makes a supervisor's job more complex and difficult. For example, unlike their non-unionized counterparts, supervisors working in unionized workplaces must know and understand the collective agreement. They have less flexibility and fewer options in dealing with issues and problems; for example, disciplining workers. They must be cautious that their actions do not violate the terms and conditions of the collective agreement. A question not addressed in the literature is whether a collective agreement can actually be helpful to supervisors. A collective agreement spells out many of the conditions of workers' employment. Thus, it provides supervisors with an easily accessible set of principles and rules from which to operate.

- Why workers join unions

A number of reasons are posited for why employees join unions. In addition to the economic reasons (e.g. higher wages, job security, benefits), Rue and Byars (1990) list the following: "(1) better working conditions; (2) more meaningful work; (3) fairer rules and procedures for determining promotions, discipline, and so on; (4) opportunity to be recognized, respected, and heard on issues; (5) opportunity to complain formally; and (6) the wish to belong to an organization of people with similar needs and desires" (p. 334). Robbins and De Cenzo (1998) place much of the responsibility for unionization at the feet of supervisors:

> In spite of reasons why employees join a union, there appears to be one common factor—you, the supervisor. If employees are upset with the

> way you handle problems, upset over how you disciplined one of their co-workers, and the like, they are likely to seek help from a union. In fact, research has shown that when employees vote to unionize, it's often a vote against their immediate supervisor rather than a vote in support of a particular union" (p. 532).

Despite their statement "research has shown," the authors do not reference any research study to support this claim. They also fail to consider the context in which supervisors act; for example, the constraints that organizational policies and practices put on their authority to meet the needs and desires of workers. While supervisors may indeed have a significant impact on employee satisfaction levels due to their daily interactions with employees, and while the "friend-or-foe relationship" between a union and management may be "partially determined by how well the supervisor does his or her job" (Rue and Byars, 1990, p. 338), I find the claim that supervisors are the *primary* source of workers' dissatisfaction and resulting motivation to unionize is unwarranted.

Summing up

In conclusion, what the review of the supervision of employees literature revealed was an abundance of writing based on opinion and few data based research studies. Much of the literature focuses on defining the functions, roles and competencies required of supervisors, as well as the similarities and differences between supervisors and managers and, to a much lesser extent, the similarities and differences between supervisors and rank-and-file workers. Sociological accounts of supervisors' work and work-related learning experiences, which I was particularly interested in, were scarce. A discussion of unionization was included in only some of this literature, and none of the resources I reviewed even acknowledged that in some organizations, particularly within the public sector, supervisors belong to unions and are often in-scope.

Collective bargaining and supervisors

Most literature on collective bargaining and supervisors tends to be American and focuses on public sector supervisors. Wahn (1976) provides a review of the development of U.S. and Canadian policy regarding supervisors' collective bargaining rights from 1935 to the mid 1970s. He acknowledges that a comparative review of U.S. and Canadian labour laws is difficult given that in the U.S. approximately 90% of jurisdiction over labour relations lies at the federal level, whereas in Canada the situation is reversed – approximately 90% of jurisdiction over labour relations lies with the provinces.

> ...unlike the United States, where most employers and their workers are caught by one collective bargaining statute administered by the National Labor Relations Board, workers in Canada and their employers are caught by eleven statutes, one federal and ten provincial, administered by eleven different labor relations boards, each with its own particular terms of reference, philosophies, organization structure, practices and procedures. (p. 347)

The U.S. statute to which Wahn (1976) refers is the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), enacted in 1935. The 1947 Taft-Hartley amendments to the Act resulted in the exclusion of supervisors from its operations. The Act applies to private sector labour relations only. Public sector labour relations in the U.S. are governed by a myriad of federal, state, and local statutes. The statute governing the U.S. federal civil service denies federal public sector supervisors collective bargaining rights (Douglas, 1989, p. 81). A number of American states and municipalities, however, do extend collective bargaining rights to their supervisors. Given this situation, it is not surprising that most of the literature on collective bargaining and supervisors focuses on the public sector.

There is a lack of consensus in the literature about whether or not public sector supervisors should in fact be extended collective bargaining rights (Jascourt, 1982, p.

209). Research and writing on this question can be divided into those who favour inclusion (i.e., support extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors) and those who favour exclusion. Following are the arguments posited by each school of thought to support its position. This is followed by an overview of empirical studies on collective bargaining and supervisors.

Arguments in favour of inclusion

One argument put forward to favour inclusion is that union membership gives workers the opportunity to participate in the determination of their working conditions and that as workers, supervisors should have this right (Murrmann, 1978). Like other workers, some argue, supervisors have job-related interests and needs that are best articulated and resolved through collective bargaining (Douglas, 1989; Lareau, 1980). In a case study of Sterling Heights, Michigan, where all city employees except the city manager and one assistant were unionized, Piskulich (1995) found that for supervisors, unionization helped to deal with the longstanding issue of job security because they were able to negotiate a "discharge for cause only" clause in their collective agreement (p. 277). For middle and senior managers (e.g. department heads), unionization helped to resolve the issue of pay increases. Their first contract included a system of salary steps that spelled out pay increases (p. 276). In another study that explored the impact of supervisor unionization at two state employers in New Jersey, Eaton and Voos (2003) found that unionization helped supervisors deal effectively with the issue of pay compression and that this led to more harmonious labour relations. Eaton and Voos (2003) also found that some of the managers they interviewed in their study supported the unionization of supervisors because of "less turnover and better moral stemming from more-regularized and less-disruptive

establishment of pay increases and greater perceived equity and predictability in the treatment of the workforce" (p. 305).

In October 2003, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) released the findings of a survey of Alberta principals and other school-based administrators. The survey was conducted by Criterion Research Corp. Ninety-one percent of those who responded to the survey (n=1,523) supported ATA membership for principals, vice-principals, and assistant principals. The number one reason given for supporting ATA membership for school-based administrators was because it has a positive impact on the teacher-administrator relationship. The second and third reasons stated were that it fosters teamwork and that administrators are also teachers – they have a community of interest with teachers.

Some of the arguments in favour of extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors pertain to public sector supervisors only and are based on perceived differences between being a supervisor in the public sector and being a supervisor in the private sector. First, it is argued that public sector supervisors do not possess the same level of administrative authority as their private sector counterparts because public sector organizations tend to have very centralized decision-making structures. Many supervisors are supervisory "in title only" and therefore, it is argued, the private sector model of exclusion is not appropriate for public sector supervisors (Balfour, 1975; Douglas, 1989; Scott and Sears, 1987; Slavney and Fleischli, 1985). Second, some authors contend that public sector supervisors have a "community of interest" with each other as well as with the workers they supervise (Balfour, 1975; Dolan, 1985, Mullins, 1982). This community of interest is fostered by the fact that some of public sector supervisors' job duties and responsibilities are the same as those of rank-

and-file workers and by the practice of supervisors being promoted from nonsupervisory positions (Douglas, 1989; Murrmann, 1978).

Third, some authors assert that unionization provides public sector supervisors with a needed buffer or protection from political pressure or influence (Balfour, 1973; Mullins, 1982). Eaton and Voos (2003) state that one of the managers they interviewed in their study reported that "lower-level managers are sometimes pressured in the application of regulations by legislatures. In such a case, union representation actually helps buffer these managers from pressure and protects them from political consideration in their decision making" (p. 302). Finally, an historical argument is cited as a rationale for extending collective bargaining rights to public sector supervisors:

> …prior to the advent of collective bargaining by public sector employees, many employee groups engaged in lobbying and informal negotiations with political bodies and public officials who have the responsibility for the establishment of wages, hours and working conditions. In many cases the leadership of such groups came from the supervisory ranks. (Slavney and Fleischli, 1985, p. 473)

There are two primary differences among those who favour inclusion. These differences relate to two factors: administrative authority and bargaining unit status. With respect to administrative authority, Hayford (1975) and Hayford and Sinicropi (1976) support inclusion for "less than bona fide" supervisors only – that is, individuals "with supervisory titles who do not have the consequential management responsibilities" (Hayford and Sinicropi, 1976, p. 143). Hayford (1975) surveyed over 250 public sector managers, supervisors, and rank-and-file workers about their attitudes regarding the role description and proper bargaining rights status for supervisors. He distinguished between bona fide supervisors and less than bona fide supervisors and found that the first group perceived themselves and all supervisors as being more closely aligned with management, while the second group perceived

themselves and all supervisors as being more closely aligned with rank-and file-workers. He argues that public sector supervisors are not a single homogeneous group, but "are unique from one another in terms of their identity groups, communities of interest, collective bargaining desires, and unit placement preferences" (p. 650). He recommends that bona fide supervisors be excluded from statutes which provide collective bargaining rights, offering the following rationale for this recommendation:

> The heart of a viable labor relations structure lies in effective contract administration…the key person in day-to-day contract administration is the bona fide supervisor. The formidable long run problems inherent in weakening this first line of management-labor communication and cooperation by allowing such individuals to bargain collectively are apparent…the division of the management structure wrought by allowing bona fide supervisors to bargain collectively would likely result in decreased managerial effectiveness on the part of the supervisory group. (p. 651)

The weakness of Hayford's (1976) recommendation is that he does not offer any empirical evidence to support his argument that permitting bona fide supervisors to bargain collectively would fragment the management structure and make supervisors less effective in the performance of their duties, so his recommendation is based on conjecture. In their study of public sector supervisors in New Jersey, Eaton and Voos (2003) found that some supervisors felt that being members of the union helped them to do their jobs better because they had a greater knowledge of the collective agreement and appropriate discipline procedures (p. 305).

Scott and Sears (1987) also conducted a study on the effects of administrative authority, as well as unionization, on public sector supervisors' loyalty to management. The sites for their study were two state mental health facilities in the state of Alabama, both in the same town with unionized supervisors represented by the same union local. All of the respondents to their survey were first-line supervisors.

Half of them were unionized and half were not. (Note: Alabama is a right-to-work state, meaning that employees in unionized workplaces have the option of joining the union or not.) With regards to administrative authority, Scott and Sears (1987) found that supervisors who perceived that they had administrative authority (i.e., were bona fide supervisors) reported higher levels of commitment to the goals of the organization than less than bona fide supervisors. However, they found no difference between the two groups in terms of whether they identified with management's or the union's position on collective bargaining issues. Based on their findings, the authors suggest that public sector employees classified as supervisors should also be invested with appropriate authority: "Our results suggest that the tendency in the public sector to bestow supervisory titles and status without a comparable level of authority is probably counterproductive to the organization's efforts to improve supervisory performance…If an employee is not going to have the authority, the employee should not have the title" (p. 129). They also found that conferring administrative authority on supervisors did not deter unionization (p. 129).

With respect to bargaining unit status, some who support extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors argue that supervisors should be in bargaining units distinct and separate from the employees they supervise. Gellens (1982) studies the nursing profession in both the public and private sectors in the U.S. She supports separate bargaining units for staff and supervisory nurses because supervisory nurses are part of management and including them in bargaining units with staff nurses would lead to conflicts of interest (p. 358). She further argues that neither group would be adequately represented if in the same bargaining unit because they have different job responsibilities and concerns (p. 358). Wahn (1976) supports separate bargaining units for supervisors because it eliminates the possibility of "a split of

allegiance," lessens the likelihood of "impairment of discipline, leading to inefficiencies in supervision," and decreases the possibility that both supervisors and rank-and-file employees will go on strike at the same time (p. 360).

Both Beer (1982) and Mullins (1982) consider the bargaining unit status of principals, vice-principals, and other supervisory personnel working in public education in the U.S. Beer writes from a management perspective and Mullins from a union perspective. Beer (1982) argues that if employers cannot prevent the unionization of their supervisors, which is their preference (p. 231), their "next best bet" is separate bargaining units for teachers and supervisory personnel (p. 232) because having the two groups in the same unit could result in supervisors identifying more with teachers than with management (p. 235). Mullins (1982) also argues for separate bargaining units. He supports this position by presenting some of the problems that could arise if teachers and school supervisory personnel are members of the same bargaining unit. For example, the employer could have "excessive leverage" and "excessive influence" over the union membership (p. 219). Supervisors could be put in a precarious position if there is a major disagreement between the union and the school board and both are issuing conflicting directives to supervisors about how they should respond to the situation (p. 219). Finally, a significant problem could arise for the union if two members embroiled in a conflict both sought the union's support and representation. For example, when a classroom teacher files a grievance against a supervisor, it has the potential not only to cause "disharmony within the ranks of the association, but both sides will attempt to claim association backing…This places the association in a bind. It has a duty of fair representation to all its members, but must breach that duty to one" (p. 219). Mullins's speculations are based on conjecture and he freely acknowledges that there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of having

supervisors in separate bargaining units (p. 222). Lareau (1980) makes the same point, while Eaton and Voos (2003) argue that in practice, separate bargaining units do not matter much because of a tendency toward pattern bargaining (p. 299), which refers to the practice of one collective bargaining unit or union waiting until another collective bargaining unit or union within the same industry or sector completes their negotiations for a new agreement and then attempts to negotiate a similar agreement for their own members.

In summary, the primary arguments in support of extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors are that supervisors should have the same rights as other workers, supervisors have a community of interests with each other as well as with the workers they supervise, and collective bargaining is an effective means for supervisors to realize their interests and needs and to resolve issues with their employers. There is diversity of opinion among those who favour permitting supervisors to unionize. Some writers favour inclusion for all supervisors, while other favour inclusion for "less than bona fide" supervisors only. In addition, some writers do not support the concept of the in-scope supervisor; that is, they argue that supervisors should be in separate bargaining units, not rank-and-file bargaining units.

Arguments in favour of exclusion

Those who oppose extending collective bargaining rights to supervisors tend to be located in a strongly dualistic perspective, arguing that unionization erodes supervisors' commitment and loyalty to their employer because they will perceive their interests to be aligned more with those of rank-and-file workers than with those of management (Lederer, 1981; Rains, 1972; Shanbhag, 2002). It is further postulated that this has a negative impact on supervisors' job performance; for example, that they will be less likely to discipline the workers they supervise not only because they

identify closely with them, but also because they may be pressured by their union to go easy on particular workers (Balfour, 1975; Coleman, 1990). As a result, the effectiveness of the employing organization will suffer.

> Management cannot continue to function effectively without the undivided loyalty of front-line supervisors, who are often the difference between the success and failure of an enterprise. Supervisors who evince unreliability by taking an active role in union activity disfavoured by their employer demonstrate a negative approach toward their positions and their work which invariably reflects itself in a more general unreliability. The infection of negativism and uncooperativeness often spreads to other supervisors and even to the higher echelons of management. Before long, morale, positive performance, and effectiveness are seriously jeopardized. (Lederer, 1981, p. 104)

Indeed, this is the rationale upon which some labour legislation such as the Taft-Hartley Act is based, aimed at effectively denying collective bargaining rights to supervisors. Embedded within this argument is the assumption that the positions taken by management and unions are always oppositional. This is an erroneous view, for increasingly, union-management cooperation is evident in such areas as occupational health and safety and employee learning. A second assumption embedded in the argument is that all workers who become active in their union are antagonistic and uncooperative to management. However, no empirical evidence supports this assumption.

Another reason posited for excluding supervisors from collective bargaining is that a bargaining unit comprised of both supervisors and the workers they supervise could result in employer intimidation and domination of the union (Balfour, 1975; Douglas, 1989, Lareau, 1980). This challenges the legitimacy of the union, it is argued, "since, theoretically, they by reason of their authority over rank and file members, will control the organization and, since they are part of management, render it impotent as a vehicle for advancing the interests of rank and file employees"

(Lareau, 1980, p. 158). This argument fails to recognize that a union is inherently democratic. The degree of authority an employee has within the workplace does not correlate with her or his authority within the union. Decision-making within the union is done collectively and based upon majority rule.

Conversely, it is also argued that the union could exert undue influence on the employer "as supervisors will be bossed by the rank and file" (Lareau, 1980, p. 157). From the perspective of supervisors, it is argued that unionized supervisors would constitute a small minority of the bargaining unit. Any specific interests and needs they have could be subsumed or compromised by the priorities of the membership as a whole (Douglas, 1989; Lareau, 1980). Those who make this argument fail to mention what are the "specific interests and needs" of supervisors. Whatever they are, it is assumed that they necessarily conflict with the interests and needs of rank-and-file workers. This argument also fails to recognize that on many issues, such as pay and working conditions, supervisors have a community of interests with rank-and-file workers.

Another argument in favour of exclusion relates to work stoppages: "Nonunionized supervisors give employers an alternative work force to use in strike situations" (Douglas, 1989, p. 12). However, most managers interviewed by Eaton and Voos (2003) did not perceive union job actions that included supervisors as problematic: "[T]hey are rare, known in advance, and typically short…Moreover, systems of accommodation under which unionized supervisors sometimes cross other employees' picket lines seem to have emerged…to minimize the problem of providing essential services during work stoppages" (p. 302).

With regards to the public sector in particular, one argument in favour of exclusion is that extending collective bargaining rights to public sector supervisors

creates inequities between the public and private sectors (Douglas, 1989). This argument ignores some of the differences noted in the previous section between being a supervisor in the public sector and being a supervisor in the private sector which call into question the appropriateness of imposing the private sector model on to the public sector.

In summary, the primary arguments posited for denying supervisors collective bargaining rights are that unionization negatively impacts supervisors' commitment to their employer, to their job performance, and to organizational effectiveness. Additional arguments in favour of exclusion are that permitting supervisors to unionize provides the opportunity for management to unduly influence the union and vice versa. While these arguments may be persuasive on an intuitive or conceptual level, there is no empirical evidence in the literature to support them (Balfour, 1975; Eaton and Voos, 2003; Scott and Sears, 1987; Wheeler, 1983; Wheeler and Kochan, 1977). Balfour (1975) argues that excluding supervisors from collective bargaining does not foster identification with management and can even have the opposite effect (p. 264). Empirical studies that have been done show that unionized supervisors can be loyal to their employer and effectively perform their duties as supervisors.

Empirical studies on the impact of supervisor unionization

In their study measuring the effects of unionization and administrative authority on supervisors' loyalty to management at two state mental health facilities in Alabama, Scott and Seers (1987) found that unionized supervisors tended to agree with the union's position on collective bargaining issues, while non-unionized supervisors tended to agree with management's position. However, there was no difference between the two groups in terms of their commitment to the goals of their employer. The authors conceptualized commitment as "not only agreement with

organizational goals, but the psychological inclination of the employee to put forth effort toward attaining those goals" (p. 123). They concluded that there is little basis for refusing public sector supervisors the right to bargain collectively.

> Our study indicated that where public sector supervisors are allowed to unionize, and choose to do so, they are not likely to display lower commitment to the goals of their employer. They may use membership in a union to work for improved employment conditions while remaining loyal and trustworthy employees. Greater loyalty and trust is unlikely to be gained through prohibition of labor organizing effects, but may be attainable where public sector organizations invest greater responsibility and authority in individuals who are expected to work toward organizational goals. (p. 130)[2]

Murrmann (1978) conducted a study on the relationship between identification with management and collective bargaining representation among police supervisors in the U.S. Identification with management was conceptualised as a "supervisor's agreement or disagreement with the anticipated management position on selected employment relations issues" (p. 183). With respect to sergeants, the author found no evidence of a relationship between identification with management and unionization. Furthermore, he found no differences among sergeants based on whether they were non-unionized, represented by rank-and-file bargaining units, or represented by separate supervisory units. The author argued that this last finding probably reflects that,

> [S]ergeants, as first-line supervisors, are relatively remote from management, and therefore, whether or not they receive representation, they perceive employment relations issues more in terms of their status as employees than in terms of their status as representatives of management. (p. 188)

With respect to lieutenants, however, Murrmann (1978) found that non-unionized lieutenants identified more with management than did their unionized counterparts and that lieutenants in rank-and-file bargaining units identified the least

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[2] Scott and Seers' (1987) results pertaining to the effects of administrative authority were discussed earlier in this chapter.

with management. The author concluded that the effectiveness of denying supervisors collective bargaining rights in order to strengthen their identification with management "is minimal in the case of first-line supervisors, while it may be substantial in the case of higher ranking police supervisors" (p. 188) and so suggests that the same legislative policy not be applied to both first-line and higher ranking police officers. Murrmann did not consider the consequences of supervisors identifying more with the rank-and-file than with management (e.g. whether it negatively impacts supervisors' performance).

A study by Wheeler and Kochan (1977) did explore the impact of unionization on supervisors' job performance. Their study involved fire fighters in over 700 U.S. cities. In addition to considering the impacts of unionization, the authors analysed the views of fire fighter supervisors – called officers – regarding their preference for unionization. The study included in-depth interviews and surveys of both fire chiefs and officers. The authors obtained performance ratings for 1,642 officers and found that unionization did not have any adverse effects on their job performance. They also found that over 80 percent of officers indicated a preference for unionization. Almost 70 percent indicated that they preferred to be in the same bargaining unit as rank-and-file fire fighters. The authors state five major empirical findings from their research:

> (1) unionization of fire officers has not lowered their identification with management—officers are able to separate the role of supervisor from that of worker; (2) unionization does not increase the amount of role conflict experienced by officers; (3) most officers, and a large proportion of fire chiefs, perceive that unionization does not have negative effects on officer performance; (4) there is little difference in the job performance of union and non-union officers; and (5) fire officers indicated a strong preference for unionization. (p. 48)

In a separate study, Wheeler (1983) examined the effects of fire officer unionization upon organizational effectiveness for several hundred municipal fire departments in the U.S. The author recognized that the concept of organizational

effectiveness is problematic: "To determine whether the organization is effective, it is necessary to ask, 'effective for whom?'" (p. 168). He considered the concept from the perspective of the public: "That is, a fire department should be judged effective if and when it provides high quality fire protection efficiently" (p. 168). He found no evidence that the unionization of fire officers impairs organizational effectiveness, but did identify other factors, such as fire fighter competence and support from local authorities, as influencing the effectiveness of fire departments and suggested that further research on this issue focus on these factors (p. 175).

In their study of the impact of unionization in the public sector, Eaton and Voos (2003) reported that on the issue of discipline, most of the line managers they interviewed stated that they saw no evidence that unionized supervisors were hesitant about disciplining workers and that discipline by unionized supervisors did take place. Only three of 12 managers interviewed stated that supervisors did not discipline workers, and one of them saw this "primarily as a civil service problem, rather than a union problem" (p. 303). When asked about union influence on managerial decisions, their responses were "incomprehension or humour" (p. 302). The authors offered two reasons for these responses: "One is because the authority of managers (represented or not) in state government is quite seriously circumscribed, and the other is because most public sector workers who are represented by unions are not particularly motivated by pro-union ideology on a day-to-day basis" (p. 302). The authors also contended that in an era of labour-management cooperation and restructuring efforts, the unionization of supervisors can be potentially beneficial because supervisors will be less inhibited "to speak freely and to assert their interests, leading to a more realistic and honest discussion on particular issues where their needs or views differ

from those of nonsupervisory workforce, such as on performance appraisals, for example" (p. 308).

Similarly, in his case study of a Michigan city, Piskulich (1995) found nothing to support "the traditional justifications for exclusion from coverage…No threats associated with contract administration, fragmentations, and loyalty were reported or noted" (p. 280) by the people he interviewed (seven individuals who were most closely associated with the city's executive and supervisory unions). Instead, he found that individuals who belonged to either of the two unions "clearly identified with management, and also expressed some measure of antipathy toward organized labour. Unionization was a defensive response…interest in unionism is instrumental rather than ideological…Nor is union membership a tie binding supervisors sympathetically to their unionized subordinates" (p. 280).

Summing up

An important point that Piskulich (1995) makes at the end of his article regarding the applicability of his findings to other situations is that "context matters" (p. 280). Other authors make similar points. For example, Wheeler and Kochan (1977) write that fire fighters are a "differentiated class" among public sector employees because, for example, "their unions have typically included officers and rank and file in one unit, and their conditions of work make officers and subordinates work together as a team. Consequently, the results of this research should not be generalized to other public sector supervisors" (p. 48). I recognize the contextual differences of the studies I have reviewed in this section. For example, those carried out in the 1970's and early 1980's were prior to severe declines in unionization and union power which occurred in the late 1980's and early 1990's and thus reflect a different era of union development. In addition, the specific workplaces and unions

studied differed in terms of factors such as union histories, structures, strengths and so forth. These factors would affect workers' and managements' attitudes toward unionization.

However, all of the empirical research I was able to find showed that while in some cases unionized supervisors may identify with the union position on collective bargaining issues, unionization had no adverse affects on their commitment to the goals of the organization, their job performance, and organizational effectiveness. These findings suggest that the rationale for prohibiting public sector supervisors from collective bargaining is questionable. I agree with Eaton and Voos (2003) that "the fundamental theoretical approach to representation that emphasizes loyalty is conceptually inadequate" (p. 310).

Chapter Summary

One limitation of both the literature on supervision of employees and the literature on collective bargaining and supervisors is that the vast majority of it is American. Given American labour laws, particularly that private sector supervisors in the U.S. are denied collective bargaining rights, it is not surprising that the literature on collective barganining and supervisors focuses on the public sector or that the literature on supervision of employees only mentions unions in conjunction with supervisors' roles in labour relations and does not consider the idea of unionized supervisors.

The perspectives represented in the literature on collective bargaining and supervisors are much more diverse than the perspectives represented in the literature on supervision of employees. In the former, the voices of lawyers, professors of management, professors of labour studies, former union activists, and former labour relations officers are heard. Even within some of these groups there is a diversity of

opinion. The writing and research on supervision of employees, however, is much less diverse, the vast majority of it by academics and consultants in the field of business. This literature also tends to present a decontextualized account of supervision of employees. For examples, differences between being a supervisor in the public sector and being a supervisor in the private sector, which are discussed in the literature on collective bargaining and supervisors, are not considered in the literature on supervision of employees.

Together, however, the literature reviewed in this chapter does raise some interesting questions pertaining to my study. For example, do unionized supervisors identify more with management or with the workers they supervise? Do they ever feel caught between these two groups? How do they perceive their role? In what ways are they impacted by being members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers they supervise? Do they believe that unionization benefits themselves, rank-and-file workers and their employer, or do they perceive unionization as a hindrance? What are the experiences of unionized supervisors? It is those sorts of questions that my study sought to address.

Chapter 3
Exploring the lived experiences of in-scope supervisors: Designing the study

The question that I explore in this study is: What are the work and work-related learning experiences of in-scope supervisors? Glesne (1998) writes that the methods researchers choose to conduct their research reflect their views "on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and…(their) perspective on the nature of reality" (p. 4). She distinguishes between the positivist paradigm with which quantitative research methods are generally associated and the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm with which qualitative research methods are generally associated. The positivist mode of inquiry "characterizes the world as made up of observable, measurable facts. Positivists assume a fixed, measurable reality exists external to people" (p. 4). The interpretivist mode of inquiry, on the other hand, "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. The ontological belief for interpretivists, therefore, is that social realities are constructed by the participants in those social settings" (p. 5). As a novice researcher, my epistemological and ontological beliefs are aligned with the interpretivist paradigm. For this reason, the methods I employed to collect and analyze the data for this research study were qualitative and interpretive. I also examined the data through a critical theory lens in order to understand more about in-scope supervisors' work and work-related learning experiences and to expose further potential tensions and contradictions of in-scope supervision.

I conducted two group interviews with the same six research participants. The interviews were held two weeks apart. Scenes from four popular films I had selected were used during the first group interview to initiate discussion regarding the experiences of in-scope supervisors. The issues and themes raised at the first group interview were explored further at the second group interview. Both group interviews

were audio taped and transcribed in full by me. Each research participant was given a copy of both interview transcripts to validate.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into eight sections in which I describe the study's overall theoretical framework; discuss the four films I selected for the research; outline the process for selecting participants and provide information about each one; explain how the data was collected and analyzed; discuss my efforts to ensure the trustworthiness of the data; and present ethical considerations (informed consent, right to opt out, and privacy and confidentiality). The final section is the chapter summary.

Theoretical Framework

A critical cultural perspective, which is aligned with my pro-labour beliefs, informs my approach to this study, including how I designed it, the film scenes I chose, the methods I used to collect the data, the questions I asked, and how I interpreted the data. There are many adult education scholars who write from a critical theory perspective, drawing on the works Marx, Gramsci, Habermas, and Freire among others (see, for example, Allman, 2001; Cervero and Wilson, 2001; Collins, 1998; Gouthro, 2002; Hart, 1990 and 1995; Mezirow, 1995; Schied, Carter and Howell, 2001; Welton, 1995). Thus, it is more felicitous to think about critical theor*ies* rather than a monolithic critical theory (Fenwick, 2001b; Foley, 2000b; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). However, there are commonalities that tie the various perspectives together. Two that are particularly relevant to my research are the concepts of power and ideology.

The focus of analysis within critical theory is power – how power embedded in social structures and relationships, cultural practices, and language, for example, serves the interests of some individuals and groups in society while oppressing others,

and operates as a form of discipline and control. Inglis (1997) discusses the nature of power and identifies two views. From a Habermasian perspective "there is a realm of truth which exists beyond power and which is central to authentic human being, communication, and voluntary social order" (p.3). From a Foucauldian perspective "there is no truth without power…It is in and through power that what is known, what is said, what is taken for granted, and what is regarded as truth are constituted" (p.4). From this latter perspective, power is not something that one group (the powerful or the oppressor) wields over another (the powerless or the oppressed). Yet this is often how power is understood. The understanding of power we gain from a reading of Foucault is "to see power in terms of discourses and practices which operate in and through each and everyone of us" (p.12). Power is something that is "located within rules and regulations which are continually adopted and transformed by individual agents" (p. 3). As a result, individuals become self-regulating and self-disciplining, thereby decreasing the need for overt methods of control (e.g. policing).

One of the means through which power is exercised is ideology. A second feature common to the various critical theory perspectives is ideology critique as a method of analysis. Ideology is a "contested concept," the most widely known meaning being "'distorted understanding', often in support of particular interests" (Foley, 1999b, p. 14). Foley (1999b) moves beyond this "negative" view of ideology, seeing it as "an active process" – that is, that it can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. Ideology can thus perform a positive function – binding groups together "by creating shared frameworks of meaning and values" – as well as a negative function – "a means of domination, of what Gramsci (1971: 12-13ff.) called 'hegemony'" (p. 15). Ideology critique involves becoming aware of how it lives within us, as well as how it supports oppressive social structures and practices. It can

reveal that the "normal order of things" is "a constructed reality that protects the interests of the powerful" (Brookfield, 2001, p. 16).

Griff Foley is one critical adult education scholar whose work has significantly influenced me. I have used his theory of learning in social action (Foley, 1999b) to analyze and understand the learning of workers involved in the 1986 Gainers' strike in Edmonton, Alberta – one of the most bitter labour disputes in the province's history (see May, 1996). As I considered the learning of the participants in my study, I found myself re-reading Foley's work (1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). He posits that his theoretical framework is pertinent for analysing learning in all forms of social life, not solely social action (Foley, 2001, p. 85).

Foley's theory is rooted in historical materialism, which is based on Marx's analysis and critique of capitalism. Historical materialism focuses on how material or economic, political and social factors shape history (Foley, 2000b, p. 284). In order to understand any aspect of social life today, it must be analysed within the context of capitalism, which Foley (2000b) defines as "a system of economic, political and cultural domination, based on two process: the alienation of labour (the separation of workers from the process and product of their labour); and reification (the commodification of all relationships)" (p. 285).

Foley's theoretical framework contains three dimensions. The first is a broad conception of education and learning. It includes not only what is often referred to as formal learning (i.e., organized and institutionalised), but also incidental learning, informal education and learning, and non-formal education. Foley (2001) contends that most learning "is informal and incidental. As people live and work they continually learn" (p. 72). He further argues that "learning is often embedded in other activities and has to be uncovered" (p. 77). This dimension of Foley's theoretical

framework is important because a broad conceptualisation allows all learning to be recognized as important.

The second dimension of Foley's theoretical framework recognizes that adult education and learning is complex, diverse, contextual, and contested (Foley, 1999b, p. 7). He demonstrates this through analysis of a series of case studies. For example, in his analysis of a campaign to save a rainforest in Australia, he shows that activists' learning was not only emancipatory but also instrumental. Instrumental learning included the development of knowledge and skills in rainforest ecology, lobbying and advocacy. Emancipatory learning included the development "of a more critical view of authority and expertise, and a recognition of their own ability to influence decision-making" (p. 4).

The third dimension of Foley's theory is an "analytical framework which enables connections to be made between learning and education on the one hand, and analysis of political economy, micro-politics, ideologies, and discourses on the other (p. 6). This dimension is important because it "connects learning to its context" (p.9). Analysis of the context in which people are situated can help us to understand, for example, how their beliefs and understandings are shaped by dominant ideologies and discourses.

In the Chapter 5, I use Foley's framework described above to understand what and how the research participants earned as they work.

Choosing the film scenes

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argue that in qualitative research, the researcher's subjectivity should be made as transparent as possible. In this section, I not only discuss each film scene used in the research, but also present and reflect upon the

questions each one raised in my mind thereby making explicit some of my own biases.

I viewed several popular films during the research proposal writing process, looking for short scenes that showed interactions between supervisors and workers. My intention was to use the film scenes as triggers for dialogue during the first group interview. Following are the films I considered: *Bread and Roses, The China Syndrome, Clockwatchers, Broadcast News, Desk Set, Married to It, 9 to 5, Norma Rae, Office Space, Silkwood, Swimming with the Sharks, waydowntown,* and *Working Girl.* I had seen some of these previously; others were recommended to me by individuals with whom I had discussed my research study; still others I learned about from Tom Zaniello's *Working stiffs, union maids, reds, and riffraff: An organized guide to films about labor.*

The four films I decided to use were *Bread and Roses, 9 to 5, Norma Rae,* and *Office Space.* I selected one or two scenes from each. The films and scenes were chosen for the following reasons: 1) I found them interesting and felt the research participants might as well; 2) they were easily accessible; 3) they were relevant to the research topic; and 4) they raised interesting questions about supervisors' experiences in the workplace. Following is a brief description of each film and the scenes selected, along with my own reflections. (See Appendix A for the scripts of the film scenes).

Office Space

Office Space is a comedy about three male computer programmers who set up a scheme to embezzle a small amount of money from their employer. They are disgruntled because their employer has hired two consultants to re-engineer the firm. Rumors of lay-offs ensue. The film also includes a sub-plot about the developing

relationship between the main character and a server who works at a restaurant frequented by the main character and his co-workers.

The scene I selected is a conversation between the server, Joanna, and her supervisor, Stan. The scene begins with Stan calling Joanna aside to talk about her "flair' – the pins and buttons the restaurant's serving staff are required to wear on their uniforms. According to company policy, each server must wear fifteen pieces of flair. As the scene progresses, Joanna and Stan become increasingly frustrated with each other – Joanna because she asks Stan repeatedly if he wants her to wear more flair but does not get a straight answer from him, and Stan because Joanna does not appear to "get" his message that he wants her to be more out-going and enthusiastic.

From my view as a supervisor and as a researcher analysing the film from a critical theory perspective, the above scene raised questions about expectations. For example, what does management expect of rank-and-file workers? Who determines what is or should be expected of workers? How are expectations communicated to workers? What do workers believe is expected of them? From where do these beliefs come? What happens if a supervisor does not agree with what management expects of workers?

It seems to me that it is not enough for Joanna to do her job effectively and efficiently; for example, to take customers' orders in a timely and accurate fashion and to be pleasant to customers. Rather, it appears that Stan and the restaurant's management expect Joanna and the other serving staff to have a particular kind of personality. Stan compares Joanna to one of her male co-workers, who we see wearing *thirty-two* pieces of flair and being very animated with customers, and asks why she cannot be more like him. I wondered at what point Joanna learned that she was expected to be very out-going, even effusive. Was it before or after she was

hired? Who is to blame when workers do not meet expectations? The workers? The person who hired them? Should we not also take a look at management practices and policies regarding performance expectations and ask some critical questions? For example, are they reasonable and fair? And whose interests do they serve?

Norma Rae

Norma Rae is a drama about a single mother of two who teams up with a union organizer to organize the workers in the textiles mill where she and her parents are employed. The film is based on the life of Crystal Lee Sutton, who helped the Textile Workers Union of America win the right to represent workers at her workplace – a Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina textiles mill owned by J.P. Stevens (see http://faculty.labcc.cuny.edu/jselden/norma_rae.htm). Zaniello (1996) calls *Norma Rae* "one of the most popular pro-union films of our era" (p. 178).

I chose two scenes from the film, both of which take place before Norma becomes involved in the campaign to organize the mill. In the first scene, the male plant manager tells Norma that she has a "big mouth" because she is always making demands on behalf of the workers. Then he offers to promote her to timing supervisor. She reluctantly accepts the promotion because it comes with a pay increase. In the second scene, Norma is shunned by her co-workers. One of them calls her "a fink." She becomes upset and accuses the plant manager of speeding up production in order to "weed out" workers. She says she is quitting her job because she does not want to lose her friends. Rather than accept her resignation, the plant manager gives Norma back her former job in production.

For me, the first scene raised questions about why workers are promoted to supervisory positions. According to the literature on supervision of employees (see Chapter 2), rank-and-file employees "with good work records and an interest in

management" (Robbins, et al., 2002, p. 12) tend to be the ones who are most often promoted. Yet in the first scene described above, the plant manager tells Norma that she has a "big mouth" and that "the only way to shut that mouth is to hand [her] a promotion." If the manager means what he says, then in this case a promotion to a supervisory position is being used as a means to silence and control an out-spoken rank-and-file worker. Norma is reluctant to accept the position because she knows "it sure ain't going to make [her] any friends." The reason she accepts it is because it comes with a pay raise, not because she has an interest in management. As a single mother of two children, it is difficult for her to turn down an offer that includes an increase in pay. In a sense then, her personal circumstances make her an easy target for exploitation; that is, to fill a position within the workplace which some workers consider undesirable.

As I watched the second scene, I wondered about relationships between co-workers and how those relationships change when one of them moves into a position of power. One of the challenges of becoming a supervisor cited in the literature on supervision of employees (see Chapter 2) is coming to terms with no longer being "one of the gang" (Rue and Byars, 1990, p. 10; Sims, et al., 2001, p. 27). Norma feels increasingly isolated because of her new job so she quits. Is it always the case that supervisors cannot be "friends" with the workers whom they supervise? What factors shape the relationship between supervisors and rank-and-file workers? For example, as a supervisor Norma's main responsibility is to scrutinize workers – specifically, how quickly and accurately they performed their tasks – and to report to management. In this context, is it any wonder that workers are suspicious and mistrustful of supervisors? But is this the case in all work contexts? Bulin (1995), who locates supervisors at the bottom of the management hierarchy, distinguishes between

supervisors' role in traditional organizations and their role in participative organizations: "In an authority-oriented, traditional organization, supervisors use tight controls, rules, and procedures to ensure worker compliance" (p. 12). Bulin (1995) further argues that tight control of workers results in "adversarial relationships between workers and management" (p. 12). In contrast, Bulin argues, in participative organizations a supervisor must "be an advisor and consultant, who coordinates work and serves as a resource for workers" (p. 13). Robbins and De Cenzo (1998) argue that while "traditional" supervisors still exist (i.e., supervisor-as-boss perspective), the expectations of supervisors are changing. They are expected to be trainers, advisors, mentors, facilitators, and coaches (p. 11). Does this mean that in participative organizations workers have more freedom and control, or are the means of surveillance and control just more subtle? Are relationships between supervisors and workers in participative organizations always less adversarial?

From my perspective, both scenes raised questions about supervisors' role in terms of the relationship between management and rank-and-file workers. Prior to being promoted to a supervisory position, Norma advocated on behalf of her fellow workers. Are supervisors able to play this role? What impact does in-scope supervisors' status as union members play in all of this? Do in-scope supervisors identify more closely with management or with the workers? What factors impact how they perceive themselves?

Bread and Roses

Bread and Roses is a drama about a young Mexican woman named Maya, who enters the United States illegally. This fictional story is based upon the real-life experiences of janitors in Los Angeles who joined the *Justice for Janitors* campaign and won the right to representation by the Service Employees International Union

(SEIU) (see http://www.seiu.org/building/janitors/about_justice_for_janitors/). With the help of her sister Rosa, Maya finds work as a janitor in the same building where Rosa is employed and which has been targeted by the SEIU. After witnessing her fellow workers being treated unfairly by their supervisor, Maya becomes involved in the organizing drive.

The scene I chose is a conversation between Berta, one of the female janitors who had been with the cleaning contractor for seventeen years, and the male supervisor, Perez. Perez has just berated the workers because he found out that they had a meeting with a union organizer in the workplace. As the workers return to work, he calls Berta aside and asks her if she would be interested in a supervisory position in another building where they have new contracts. She is excited about the prospect of earning more money and receiving benefits and a week's paid vacation, until Perez asks her to tell him who organized the meeting with the union representative. The underlying message is that the promotion to supervisor is tied to her willingness to betray her fellow workers. Despite being asked repeatedly, Berta does not disclose who among her co-workers organized the meeting.

For me, this scene raised questions about supervising in unionized workplaces. What is supervisors' role in labour relations? How does their role change when they are in-scope? Some of the literature on supervision of employees discusses the role of supervisors in unionized workplaces but never considers situations in which supervisors themselves are members of the union. I also wondered whether supervising in a unionized workplace is more "difficult" than supervising in a non-unionized workplace. The existence of a collective agreement means that there is more supervisors need to know and that there are more controls on their actions. On

the other hand, a collective agreement may reduce ambiguity because it spells out many of the terms and conditions governing workers' employment.

Similar to *Norma Rae*, this scene also raised questions in my mind about why workers are promoted into supervisory positions. Berta is exploitable because she is not highly employable – she is low skilled and does not speak English well. Thus, she has a great deal to lose if she does not toe the management line.

9 to 5

9 to 5 is a comedy about three female office workers, one of whom is a supervisor "who trains the new men and watches in frustration as they get promoted over her" (Zaniello, 1996, p. 173). The women kidnap their male department head and transform their workplace into a "humane office environment" (p. 173). For example, they set up an on-site day care and institute flextime for workers.

In the scene I chose, Violet (the supervisor) asks her supervisor, Franklin (the department head) if he has read a report she prepared to improve office efficiency. He tells her that he has not had time to read it. However, when Franklin is commended for the report by the company president right in front of Violet and one of her co-workers, Roz, Violet realizes that her boss has not only read the report, but has taken credit for her work. Just prior to this Roz asks Violet if she had read a memo that Roz sent out to all the supervisors about the need to "crack down on any signs of unionization."

This scene raised similar questions as *Bread and Roses* regarding supervisors' role in labour relations and how that role is different for non-unionized supervisors and in-scope supervisors. I also wondered about how in-scope supervisors would react if they were ever pressured by management to do something that might harm the union, or vice versa.

The scene also made me think about in-scope supervisors' relationships with the managers to whom they report. Do they ever feel caught between their manager and the workers they supervise? For example, managers often make decisions that supervisors and rank-and-file workers must implement. How do supervisors act in situations where workers do not agree with the decision? And what if they agree with the workers? If an in-scope supervisor was having a dispute with the manager and could not resolve it, would she or he go to the union for support?

Finally, this scene raised questions about gender and the workplace. For example, if Violet had been a male, would the department head have taken credit for her work?

Research Participants

Recruitment and selection

The participant recruitment process began after the proposed research study received ethics approval. My goal was to recruit six individuals who had been employed in a supervisory position for a minimum of six months; who were members of the same collective bargaining unit as at least one of the workers whom they supervised; who were working in the Province of Alberta with either a federal or provincial government department; and who were working in an administrative, service or program unit. This last requirement excluded workers in technical, trades, and professional (e.g. engineers, nurses) occupations. One the reasons for these criteria was that I wanted the research participants to have some common experiences and understandings. In addition, my understanding was that it is much more common to find supervisors who are in-scope in the public sector than in the private sector so I felt that it would be easier to recruit participants if I delimited the target group to government workers.

My initial plan was to recruit participants through snowball referrals. I began by contacting people who might know individuals who fit the participant criteria listed above. These contacts were asked to distribute the Overview of the Research Project (see Appendix B) to individuals who fit the participant criteria and who they felt might be interested in taking part in the study. The description included a telephone number and e-mail address for prospective participants to contact me directly so that I could personally explain the purpose and nature of the research study, and assess their interest and suitability for the study. Five individuals who worked with the provincial government contacted me and indicated an interest in the study. Unfortunately, none of them met the criteria – four were not members of a union that represented any of the workers they supervised and one was not a supervisor.

I decided to broadened the selection criteria to include individuals who had been but were no longer in-scope supervisors at the time of the study, as well as individuals who work with any public sector employer, not solely the federal or provincial civil service. I then contacted two individuals I know personally who fit the expanded criteria – one was an in-scope supervisor at the time of the study and the other had previously been an in-scope supervisor. Both agreed to participate in the study. One of these individuals distributed the Overview of the Research Project to four colleagues who also fit the criteria – three agreed to participate in the study and one declined because of the time commitment. The sixth participant was recruited through a personal contact. Two more individuals who fit the criteria contacted me after the final participant had been confirmed. They were thanked for their interest in the research but were not invited to participate.

As it turned out, all six participants worked for the same employer, although in different areas of the organization, and were members of the same union. I was quite familiar with both their employer and their union. In my opinion, this situation turned out to be advantageous. It meant that we did not need to spend as much time learning about each person's workplace as we would have had the participants worked for different employers and belonged to different unions, and had I had no or little knowledge of both organizations. However, this situation would have been disadvantageous if the participants felt there was an increased threat that what they shared would be found out by someone outside of the group because they all worked for the same employer and belonged to the same union. It is difficult to assess for a certainty if that was the case; however, my sense from what I heard and observed was that they were willing to disclose what they considered very confidential information and that they trusted each other not to breach the commitment they made to respect each other's privacy.

Participant characteristics

The participants who took part in the study ranged in age from 26 to 56 years. In terms of level of education, five had completed a bachelor's degree and one had completed high school. The length of time they had worked for their employer ranged from three to 25 years, with an average of 13 years and a total of 78.5 years. In terms of gender and racial characteristics, the group included five females and one male. All were white. Five were Canadian-born and one was born in what would be considered a western country.

The total length of time the participants had been in a supervisory position ranged from six months to 15 years, with an average of 4.5 years and a total of 27 years supervisory experience. At the time of the study, three of the participants

supervised two workers, one supervised four, and one supervised 14. One of the participants was not a supervisor at the time of the study, but had been seconded in the past to a supervisory position where she supervised four workers. The total number of workers the participants had ever supervised, both in their current workplace and with previous employers, ranged from four to 40, with an average of 15.3 and a total of 92. At the time of the study, five of the six participants worked in an area of the organization where they previously held a non-supervisory position. All but one of the participants had experience supervising a former co-worker. This same individual was not a supervisor at the time of the study.

Following is a brief introduction to each research participant. I use pseudonyms here in order to protect their identity.

Bevin – Bevin was one of two research participants who had worked at the organization for more than 20 years at the time of the study, although she had been a supervisor for just under five years. When I asked her to participate in the study, she agreed but said she felt she would not have much to contribute. As it turned out, she was one of the most "talkative" members of the group and provided what I felt were very insightful comments. Of all the research participants, Bevin was the one who seemed to have the most concern about confidentiality, perhaps because she shared so openly and honestly. She seemed to me to be the one who was most critical of the union; however, she did support belonging to the union.

Chris – Of all the group members, Chris had the most experience as a supervisor both in terms of number of years and number of workers she had ever supervised. At the time of the study, she had been working at the organization for about 18 years.

Kim – Kim was one of two research participants with less than two years supervisory experience, although she was in the middle of the group in terms of the number of workers she had ever supervised. Kim was the "quietist" member of the group; however, she was one of three participants who wrote comments on their transcripts apart from correcting errors.

Li – At the time of the study, Li had worked at the organization longer than any of the other research participants; however, she had the least amount of experience as a supervisor both in terms of number of years and number of workers she had ever supervised. Li was also one of the most "talkative" members of the group. I would characterize Li as the most "pro-union" of the group. She had been active in the union for several years prior to the research study. My sense was that her support for unions was ideologically based, while the others tended to support the union for instrumental reasons (e.g. better wages and benefits).

Mo – At the time of the study, Mo had been working for the organization for less than four years. She was a supervisor for most of those years and supervised more workers at the time of the study than any other participant. Mo's participation in the group discussions fluctuated the most. She was quiet for long periods of time but very talkative at others. She also wrote several long comments on her interview transcripts.

Nat – Of all the research participants, Nat had worked for the organization for the shortest length of time; however, he was in the middle of the group in terms of number of workers he had ever supervised. He was also the youngest member of the group and the only male.

Collecting the data

This section explains the process used to collect the data for the research study. When the research proposal was formulated, I did not have a specific label for

the method I planned to employ to collect the research data. I knew that I wanted to dialogue with in-scope supervisors about their experiences rather than develop and administer a survey or questionnaire to gather the data. I entered the research study with several years experience as a supervisor, including as an in-scope supervisor, so I could have developed a survey or questionnaire based upon these experiences as well as the literature review (see Chapter 2). However, doing so risked missing out on learning about questions and understandings that were important and of interest to other in-scope supervisors. My reasoning was that through conversations with other in-scope supervisors, space would be provided to surface issues relevant to our shared locations that I had not considered.

I could have interviewed individuals in personal, open-ended conversations to explore their experiences, but I decided on group interviews because in a group setting, individual members' thoughts and feelings are often triggered by comments and behaviours of other group members. According to Berg (1998),

> Interactions among and between group members stimulate discussion in which one group member reacts to comments made by another…The resulting synergy allows participants to draw from one another or to *brainstorm* collectively with other members of the group. A far larger number of ideas, issues, topics, and even solutions to a problem can be generated through group discussion than through individual conversations. (p. 101)

I also knew that I wanted the group discussions to be fairly unstructured in order to make the process as democratic as possible; that is, I wanted to share power with the research participants similar to how critical educators share power with learners (Foley, 2001, p. 74). I wanted the research participants to have a role in determining the direction of the group discussions. In addition, as an in-scope supervisor myself, I did not want my own preconceptions and prejudices to limit the data. According to Kerslake and Goulding (1996), by using a highly structured group

process, "aspects of the subject evident to participants may remain unexplored and new understandings may not have a chance to surface" (section 3.1, para. 3).

Finally, I knew that I wanted to use film in order to stimulate participants' thinking about the research topic and promote group discussion. Gaskell (2000) discusses various "stimulus materials" – free association, pictures, drawings, photographs, and drama – that can be used in group interviews in order "to promote ideas and discussion as a means of getting people to use their imagination and to develop ideas and themes" (p. 50).

The data collection method outlined above is in essence focus group interviewing (Berg, 1998; Gaskell, 2000; Gomm, 2004; Kerslake and Goulding, 1996; Lee, 1999). Traditionally, focus groups have been used for market research but their use in social science research is increasing (Gomm, 2004; Kerslake and Goulding, 1996). Berg defines focus group interviewing as "guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher" (p. 100).

Group interview one

The purpose of the first group interview was to surface the issues related to being an in-scope supervisor that were of particular relevance to the research participants. The meeting lasted approximately three hours.

As the participants arrived, I asked each one to complete the Participant Information Form (see Appendix E). Once everyone had arrived, I welcomed them and reminded them that when they signed the Participant Consent Agreement (see Appendix D), they committed to respecting the privacy and confidentiality of each other by not discussing the interviews or individuals' contributions with anyone outside of the group. I also reminded them that they should feel free to limit their

involvement in the discussions to a level with which they were comfortable. Each group member then introduced her or himself, stating their name, some information about their work context (e.g. how long they had been in a supervisory role), and why they agreed to participate in the research study. All of them indicated that they decided to participate in the study because they thought the topic was interesting; some added that they felt in-scope supervision is an important issue that has been ignored; and some also stated that until I invited them to participate in the study, they had never thought about what it meant to supervise someone who belonged to the same union that they did. I then introduced myself and explained my interest in the research topic.

Next, I proposed an agenda – that we watch the scene(s) I had chosen from each of the four films that I had selected and that each viewing be followed by a group discussion. I asked everyone to think about the following question as they watched the film scenes: What issues and questions are raised in the scenes related to being a supervisor in general and an in-scope supervisor in particular? I added that anyone could initiate the group discussion following each film. For example, someone might begin the discussion by talking about the supervisory issue that came to her or his mind; or, someone might relate a story from her or his own experience; or, someone might pose a question to the rest of the group. Before playing the scenes, I gave a brief description of each film plot. I also offered to replay the scenes prior to beginning the group discussion. However, no one requested a second viewing of any of the scenes. We took a break in between the second and third films.

The first scene we watched was from the film *Office Space*. It was followed by, what seemed to me, a long period of uncomfortable silence. In order to limit the influence of my own perceptions and biases on the group, my hope was that one of

the participants would begin the discussion. I struggled to resist the urge to break the silence. Finally, Nat made a comment and we soon found ourselves in a lively discussion. I did not experience the same periods of uncomfortable silence following the remaining three films, and it was never the same person who began the discussion. Each discussion began with comments specifically about the scene(s) we had just watched but quickly moved into conversation about the participants' experiences in the workplace. Fortunately, no one person dominated the discussion. That's not to say that some participants did not talk more than others; they did. However, my sense was that this was more a reflection of individual differences. For example, Bevin commented that she tends to "think aloud"; therefore, she was more "talkative" than some of the others. I found all of the participants eager and willing to share their thoughts and feelings.

At the end of the interview, I asked participants how they would like to receive the interview transcript. All chose to have it sent to them by e-mail. They were asked to validate the transcript prior to the second group interview and encouraged to write any corrections, additional thoughts, questions, and the like directly on their transcript. I wanted to provide them with a space to include thoughts that came to them after the meeting. In addition, I saw this as a way to deal with the potential problem of individual research participants being overly influenced by other group members. According to Gomm (2004), one of the methodological issues of group interviews is the influence that group members can have upon each other: "A number of people are involved and encouraged to vocalise, so there are plenty of opportunities for all of them to influence each other as to what is said" (p. 171). I emphasized that their written comments would not be shared with the rest of the group. So, for example, if someone disagreed with nother group members'

perspectives or opinions on a particular issue but did not want to vocalize this disagreement, space was still provided to disclose her or his views to me.

I noted that I would ask them to return their transcripts to me at the second group interview. I confirmed the date with them, and proposed that at that time we review the transcript from the first interview and identify and further discuss those issues and themes related to their experiences raised during the first interview, as well as additional ones that they may have thought of in the interim.

It took me one week to transcribe the first group interview. During transcription, I made notes about the data in my research journal. Glesne (1998) refers to this as memo writing: "[B]y getting your thoughts down as they occur, no matter how preliminary or in what form, you begin the analysis process" (p. 131). I consulted the participants' employer and union's websites and their collective agreement for clarification on some of the issues discussed. Thus, the collective agreement and policies and procedures documents located on their employer and union's websites became sources of data for the study.

After the audiotapes were transcribed, I e-mailed a copy of the transcript to each research participant, which gave them one week to validate the transcript prior to the second group interview. I also read through the transcript several times, making additional notes. I reviewed these notes carefully and prepared from them a list of questions, issues and themes to propose for discussion at the second group interview.

Group interview two

The purpose of the second group interview, which took place two weeks after the first one, was to identify and further discuss the main issues and themes that were raised during the first group interview. The research participants were also invited to

bring forward additional issues that had not been discussed during the first group interview, although none of them did.

I began by reminding the participants about the importance of respecting the confidentiality and privacy of each other. Next, I asked if anyone had any new or additional thoughts about the film scenes we discussed at the first meeting. I was the only one with additional issues for discussion – one from the film, *Office Space*, and the other from the film, *Norma Rae*.

Next, we went through the transcript from our first meeting. I asked if anyone had any additional comments about anything in the transcript that they wished to share, a question related to the discussion, or a point of clarification. Besides noting a few typos in the transcript, there were no issues or questions raised for further discussion, so with the group's permission, we went through the questions, issues and themes that I had identified.

As with the first group interview, all of the research participants appeared open and willing to share their experiences and beliefs. However, because no one besides me had come to our second meeting with a list of questions, issues and themes to discuss, I directed or guided the discussion at the second group interview more so than at the first. According to Lee (1999), it is not unusual for group interviews to become increasingly structured as they progress: "In the beginning, the focus group might be relatively unstructured, but over time the moderator imposes increasing structure as he or she moves the group along a desired theme" (p. 71).

At the end of the interview, I checked that e-mail was still everyone's preferred choice for receiving the interview transcript. I provided each participant with a self-addressed, stamped envelope that they could use to return the transcript to me. I explained that if I needed to clarify something with them, I would contact them

individually. The participants agreed that this could be done via e-mail. Thus, I decided that follow up individual meetings were unnecessary, even though I had considered scheduling individual meetings. Before I ended the interview I asked each person to comment on her or his participation in the research study or to make any final comments.

All of the participants handed in their validated transcript from the first group interview except for one person who wanted to add some written comments to her transcript before returning it to me. It took me approximately one week to transcribe the second group interview. As with the first, I made notes in my research journal during transcription.

All validated transcripts, including the one not handed in from the first group interview, were returned to me within approximately four weeks of the second group interview. Some of the participants suggested corrections and offered additional comments. These corrections and additional comments were added to the transcripts to prepare them for the data analysis process.

I contacted the research participants by e-mail a few months after the group interviews. I was curious to know their thoughts about my using film to promote group discussion about the experiences of in-scope supervisors. Three of the participants responded. All three indicated that they felt film was an "excellent" way of initiating discussion. Nat added that while the discussion moved away from the scenes, there were "*triggers in the films that reminded us of other things in our own working situations, even though the working environments (in the films) were generally different than ours.*" I too felt that the films were an effective means for initiating dialogue. I also felt that they provided a way for me to limit the degree to which I directed the group discussion because I left it to one of the research

participants to make the first comment after viewing each of the film scenes. I did worry, however, that the film scenes I had chosen might limit the discussion. However, as I noted earlier and as Nat's above comment suggests, the discussion did move away from the scenes to the personal experiences and beliefs of the participants.

In hindsight, I wish I would have given the research participants some time after each viewing to reflect upon the film scene(s) and record their thoughts in writing. A thought or question may have occurred to someone but they may have lost it during the ensuing discussion. I would have asked them to hand in to me their written notes as those notes may have provided me with further insight into their experiences and beliefs.

Analysing the data

This section explains the process used to interpret the tapes and transcripts, as well as my field notes and research journal that represented the data for this study. According to Ely (1991), data analysis involves finding "some way or ways to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data; to reduce and reorganize and combine so that readers share in the researcher's findings in the most economical, interesting fashion" (p. 140).

As noted in the previous section, I actually began the data analysis process while transcribing the first group interview by making notes about the data in my research journal, as well as reviewing the research participants' collective agreement and policy and procedures documents on their employer and union's websites in order to clarify my understanding of some of the issues that were raised. I did the same as I transcribed the second group interview. This process fits with Ely's (1991) comment that "qualitative research involves almost continuous data analysis from the very beginning of data collection" (p. 140).

Final data analysis began once I had all of the transcripts back from the research participants. To say that I felt overwhelmed at this point is indeed an understatement. I read through the transcripts several times, sometimes while listening to the audio recordings of the group interviews. My attempts to organize and make sense of all of the data I had before me consisted of numerous start and restarts, as well as periods of procrastination when I felt like giving up. I consulted several resources on analysing qualitative data (for example, Gomm, 2004; Myers, 2000; Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Symon and Cassell, 1998). It was the chapter on interpreting data in Ely (1991) that I found most helpful in getting me out of this period of stagnation.

I organized the data into categories. First, I read and re-read several times the discussions following each of the films scenes I showed at the first group interview and identified the issues that emerged during those discussions to come up with my first list of categories. Next, I read and re-read the transcript from the second group interview adding to my list of categories new issues that arose. Then, I organized all of the data into the categories. My next step was to search for themes emerging from the data. Ely (1991) defines a theme "as a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact" (p. 150).

After conducting an interpretive analysis of the data, I looked at the data through a critical theory lens. My reason for doing so was to deepen my understanding of the issues and themes identified through my interpretive analysis. I was particularly interested in making explicit the tensions and contradictions of in-scope supervision, and how various power structures and relationships shaped the participants everyday learning and identity.

Trustworthiness

One of the strategies I used to augment the trustworthiness of the research was "member checking" (Glesne, 1998, p. 32). As noted, I personally transcribed both group interviews and provided each research participant with a copy of the transcripts to check for accuracy. I clarified any ambiguous statements, as well as my understandings and interpretations of the dialogue with the research participants. I also referred to the participants' employer and union's websites and to their collective agreement on particular issues discussed. The research participants were invited to make additional comments directly on their transcripts. My own experience tells me that after participating in a group discussion, individuals often reflect upon the dialogue and have further thoughts about it. I wanted to provide a space for the research participants to add additional thoughts they might have had after the interviews. Another reason why I invited participants to write additional thoughts and reflections on their transcripts was to counter the risk of individual research participants choosing not to express their views on a particular issue for fear of going against the perceived opinion of the group. I made it clear that any comments added to the transcripts would not be shared with the rest of the group. Thus, space was also provided for the research participants to disclose dissenting opinions to me. All corrections and comments were added to the final transcripts.

A second strategy used to augment the trustworthiness of the research was reflexivity, which Lincoln and Guba (2000) define as "the process of critically reflecting on the self as researcher" (p. 183). I entered the research study with over fifteen years experience as a supervisor in a unionized workplace, including over three years as an in-scope supervisor, as well as with a strong interest in and commitment to the collective principles and values associated with unionization.

According to Glesne (1998), "continual alertness to your own biases, your own subjectivity...assists in producing more trustworthy interpretation" (p. 151). In order to counter the effects of my own biases on the validity of the research, I reflected upon my own subjectivity throughout the research process by keeping a journal of my thoughts and observations.

A third strategy I used to augment the trustworthiness of the research was a form of triangulation. While the most common form of triangulation in qualitative research is multiple data collection methods, it is not the only form. According to Glesne (1998), other forms of triangulation include using multiple data sources, multiple researchers, and multiple theoretical frameworks (p. 31). The form of triangulation I incorporated into my research study was multiple data sources. These included the tapes and transcripts from each of the group meetings, written comments participants added to their transcripts, my field notes and research journal, and the participants' collective agreement between their employer and union, and policy and procedures documents posted on the participants' employer and union's websites.

Ethical Considerations

In compliance with the University of Alberta Standards for Human Research Participants, an application for ethics review of the proposed research was submitted to the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board. It addressed the following ethical issues regarding the collection, analysis, storage and dissemination of the research data.

Informed consent

Each prospective research participant was provided with an Information Letter (see Appendix C) which described the purpose of the research study, the ethical procedures, and what they could expect from their participation (e.g. time

commitment, research activities). This information was also provided orally at the beginning of the first group interview. Informed consent was obtained by requiring all participants to sign a Participant Consent Agreement (see Appendix D). By signing the Agreement, they agreed to participate in the research study; to having all group and individual interviews recorded on audiotape; to allow me to use the data collected for my Master's thesis and scholarly publications or presentations; and to respect the privacy and confidentiality of all research participants.

Right to opt out

The Participant Consent Agreement informed prospective participants that they had the right to withdraw from the research study at any time and for any reason without penalty, harm or loss of promised benefit, and that if they exercised their right to opt out, any information they had provided up to that point would be excluded from the study unless they specifically gave permission to use the information. Fortunately, no participants chose to withdraw from the study.

Both the Information Letter and Agreement also informed participants that they had the right to limit their participation to a level with which they were comfortable, and that they could, at any time, revoke information they had provided and that this information would not be included in the research study.

Privacy and confidentiality

Given that a group process was employed to collect the data for this study, it was necessary that all research participants commit to respecting the privacy and confidentiality of each other for two primary reasons: first, to reduce the potential for threat or harm to any of the participants and others, and second, to ensure the quality of data. Berg (1998) argues that "confidentiality is critical if the researcher expects to get truthful and free-flowing discussions during the course of the focus group

interview. If group members feel apprehensive or inhibited by fear of somehow being exposed, they will not freely disclose their feelings and perceptions" (p. 114).

As mentioned above, a commitment to respecting the privacy and confidentiality of other participants was obtained by having each participant sign the Participant Consent Agreement. In addition, at the beginning of each group meeting, the participants were reminded of the importance of their commitment.

Privacy and confidentiality issues were also addressed by excluding all specific identifiers (e.g. names of participants and non-participants) from the research report. All participants have been given a pseudonym and only a general description of the participants' employer and union is provided. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the participants' employer is referred to as the Prairie Learning Institute (PLI) and their union as the Public Employees' Union (PEU).

Finally, only I have had access to the data. All materials were and continue to be stored in a secure location in my home and will be destroyed five years after the study has been successfully defended.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the theoretical framework I used to approach the research study, the research participants and how I recruited them, the methods I used to collect and analyze the data, and what I did to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. I also described and reflected on the film scenes I selected in order to stimulate the research participants' thoughts and discussion. Finally, I outlined how I ensured that the study complied with the University of Alberta Standards for Human Research Participants.

I conducted two group interviews with the same six research participants. They all worked for the same organization and were members of the same union.

Both group interviews were audio taped and transcribed by me. The research participants validated both transcripts. I analyzed the data using the interpretive approach described from Ely (1991). My analysis also included a critical reading of the data. The next two chapters present and discuss the findings.

Chapter 4
Conversations with in-scope supervisors

One of the greatest concerns I had when it came to presenting and discussing the research findings was how to honour the voices and represent the experiences of the in-scope supervisors who participated in my study. I wanted to move beyond mere description to link their experiences to the context in which they are located to show how various structures, relationships, ideologies and discourses shaped their experiences, particularly their learning. I accomplished this by conducting both an interpretive and critical reading of the data. For the latter, I drew heavily from Foley's theory of learning in social action (see Foley, 1999a and 2001). It helped me to understand the learning embedded in the participants' experiences much more deeply than an interpretive analysis alone would have accomplished. For example, it revealed that the participants' learning was predominately informal and incidental, and that while it was potentially powerful, it tended to reproduce the systems in which they worked.

In this chapter I present and discuss issues raised by the research participants – what they were and what was said about them, as well as my own critical reflections on them. By issues, I mean the specific topics taken up during the two group interviews. Some arose directly out of the film scenes from the first group interview; others were triggered by comments made by the participants; still others I brought forward as a result of my literature review and analysis of the first group interview. I then present and discuss themes identified through analysis of the data, including the audiotapes and transcripts of the group interviews, my field notes, participants' written notes to me, and the participants' collective agreement. Themes refer to underlying ideas that explicate the participants' experiences of being in-scope supervisors.

First, however, I discuss the context in which the participants worked. Knowledge of the context is required to understand in-scope supervisors' experiences – for example, how they acted in particular situations and why they acted the way they did. Foley (1999c) argues that to understand what and how people learn, the context in which they are situated must be considered: "To understand the complexities of workplace learning we need a way of analytically connecting everyday informal learning in particular workplaces to both the micropolitics of those workplaces and to their wider political and economic contexts" (p. 2).

The context

As noted in the previous chapter, all six participants worked for the same employer – a large, complex, and diverse organization, hereinafter referred to as the Prairie Learning Institute or PLI. Factors such as common practices varied throughout the organization. I heard comments like "*it all depends on where you work*," "*in your area maybe*," and "*I don't know if that would necessarily happen in other areas*." As a result, the participants' experiences and perceptions were not homogeneous. The specific work context in which each participant was located mattered. However, certain contextual aspects were shared by all participants. These are explained in the remainder of this section.

Wider political and economic context

The PLI is located within the public sector in the Province of Alberta, where a right-wing Progressive Conservative party headed by current Premier Ralph Klein has been in power since December 1992. Public services, such as education, health care and social services, experienced drastic cuts during the Klein government's earlier years, as it focussed upon balancing the provincial budget and paying down the debt. According to Taft (1997), spending in Alberta on public programs peaked in the mid-

1980s; "by the end of 1995, public spending had fallen $1.9 billion since the Klein government came into office" (p. 28).

These cutbacks were driven by neo-liberalism, an ideology that asserts the primacy of the private over the public and positions "'the market' as the proper guiding instrument by which people should organize their economic lives" (MacEwan, 1999, p. 4). Neo-liberalism contains a set of assumptions about the role of government in society: "maximize exports; reduce social spending; curtail state economic regulation; and empower capital to reorganize national economies as part of transnational trading blocks" (Brodie, 1996, p. 385). The neo-liberal purpose of learning and education is to service the economy; thus, knowledge and learning become commodities, "just like the goods for which we exchange money" (Brookfield, 2001, p. 11). At the level of the individual, the good neo-liberal citizen "recognizes the limits and liabilities of state provision and embraces her obligation to work longer and harder…to become more self-reliant" (Brodie, 1996, p. 391).

While spending by the Klein government on public services has increased since the deep cuts of the mid and late 1990s, neo-liberalism remains the ideology upon which its policies are firmly based. For example, the Government's 2004 strategic plan, *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, identifies self-reliance as the "core value of Albertans" (Government of Alberta, 2004, p, 14) and asserts that "personal choice is the only limit to opportunity" (p.15).

Contextual aspects of the participants' workplace

Several features of the participants' workplace are particularly relevant to this study. First, the vast majority of the PLI's workforce, including managerial staff, is unionized. Supervisors and rank-and-file workers are members of the same collective bargaining unit, hereinafter referred to as the Public Employees' Union or PEU. By

"member," I mean that all supervisory and rank-and-file employees hired into a position included in the bargaining unit must pay union dues. However, employees have the choice of whether or not to become voting members. Whether they are voting members or not, all employees in the bargaining unit enjoy the benefits and rights provided by the collective agreement.

Managers employed by the PLI are members of a separate union altogether. Reflecting this dichotomy, many human resource functions (e.g. hiring, employee relations) are administered by two separate personnel departments – one for rank-and-file and supervisory employees and one for managers. Some features of their respective collective agreements, which define a number of terms and conditions of their employment, are the same. There are also significant differences that reflect inequities based upon each groups' location within the organization's structural hierarchy. One difference that came up in the group interviews was hours of work. Hours of work are spelled out in the participants' collective agreement, whereas managers' collective agreement is silent on this issue. Thus, managers' hours of work are not subject to the same levels of surveillance and control as are supervisors' and rank-and-file employees', and managers have more freedom and flexibility in determining their hours of work than do supervisors and rank-and-file employees. According to the participants, this disparity was a source of contention for many rank-and-file workers. Further in this chapter, I discuss how the participants, as in-scope supervisors, were impacted by this disparity.

Second, certain articles of the participants' collective agreement are particularly relevant to this study – specifically, performance reviews and increments, discipline, and grievances. According to the collective agreement, supervisors must conduct a formal performance review of rank-and-file employees on completion of

their six-month probationary period and annually thereafter. A pay increase equivalent to a single increment (1.0) must be awarded for performance deemed satisfactory or better, although an employee may be awarded increments of 1.5 or 2.0. Performance deemed unsatisfactory must be given a zero increment. If the supervisor fails to complete an employee's annual performance review, the employee is automatically given a single increment. Withholding an increment is considered a disciplinary action; others are written reprimand, suspension with pay, demotion, and dismissal. The agreement prohibits a member of the PEU from taking these actions against another member. Thus, in-scope supervisors cannot discipline (as it is defined in their agreement) the workers they supervise. Rather, discipline must be administered by someone outside of the bargaining unit; in practice, managers to whom in-scope supervisors report. So if an in-scope supervisor assesses an employee's performance as unsatisfactory, a manager must communicate the zero increment to the employee.

The employee has the right to grieve disciplinary action, such as this. Grievances are submitted in writing to the personnel department and the grievance hearing includes the personnel director, the manager, a union representative, and the employee. The in-scope supervisor is not involved in the grievance hearing, even if the grievance ultimately resulted from her or his evaluation of the employee's performance, and if the hearing's results will affect the supervisor's subsequent relations with employees.

Third, the PLI uses the Aiken Plan to evaluate and determine salary levels of supervisory and non-supervisory positions. Nine factors are considered: 1) complexity and judgement of the position; 2) formal education and training required to do the job; 3) experience required; 4) independence of action or initiative; 5) consequences of

errors; 6) contact both within and outside the organization; 7) character and scope of supervision; 8) physical demands; and 9) working conditions. The job description used to evaluate the position is generally written by the manager with input from the supervisor, as well as from the employee in the position if it is not vacant. The evaluation of the position, however, is done by the PLI's personnel department; in other words, in-scope supervisors and managers do not determine the grade level and salary range for a position. Under the collective agreement, employees who feel that their grade level does not reflect the complexity and judgement of their position, the education and training required, and so forth, have the right to request that the position be re-evaluated.

Fourth, although external applicants for supervisory positions are sometimes hired, it is common practice throughout the PLI to recruit supervisors from the rank-and-file workforce. This was the case for all six participants. Each one moved from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory position within their departments. As will be shown further in this chapter, their history as rank-and-file workers shaped their relationships with the former co-workers they supervised, as well as their work identities.

Finally, the PLI does not require supervisors to undergo any kind of formal supervisory training. The personnel department offers short seminars and workshops for all employees. They are voluntary and employees must receive permission from their managers to attend because they are offered during working hours. Only a very few are targeted to staff in supervisory roles (e.g. interview techniques). The PLI also provides funding for staff learning and development. Rank-and-file workers and supervisory staff have access to two funding programs, whereas managers have access to three. As well, the total amount of funding to which an individual employee has

access is significantly greater for managers than for rank-and-file and supervisory employees. Along with inequities between the collective agreements of the two groups of employees, providing managers with greater access to learning opportunities reflects class structures within the PLI.

The foregoing discussion of the participants' context introduces some tensions and contradictions of being a supervisor in general and an in-scope supervisor in particular. For example, workers' discontent about inequities between the terms and conditions of employment for managers and for themselves was a tension that the participants dealt with in their roles as supervisors. The limits that the collective agreement placed on the participants' authority to discipline had a contradictory effect on how workers they supervised perceived them. These and other tensions and contradictions are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Issues arising from the group interviews

The main issues raised and discussed during the group interviews spoke to the participants' interpersonal relationships with the workers they supervised and the managers to whom they reported, and to their perceptions and understandings of their union. The issues are: expectations of employees, promotions, being active in the union, what it means to be a union member, supervising in a unionized workplace, assessing workers' job performance, and recognition. Most were discussed more than once and the discussions overlapped and intermingled. For the most part, they are presented in this section in the sequence of their emergence, starting with expectations of employees as it was the first issue raised at the first group interview.

Expectation of employees

From the film scene in *Office Space* (see Appendix A for the script of the scene) discussion arose about expectations of employees. The research participants

agreed that what is expected of employees in terms of their performance should be clearly communicated to them in their job description and when they are hired. They felt that the supervisor in *Office Space* was not communicating his expectations directly and that there was a hidden, underlying message in what he said.

> *Mo: It's almost as if he is using the flair to raise another issue.*
>
> *Chris: I thought he could have been a lot more direct with her. If he has a problem with her personality and the way she is doing things, why didn't he just say that instead of saying that it's the buttons, the number of buttons that you wear.*
>
> *Li: Yeah, he keeps using that phrase "bare minimum." When you use words like that you're wondering if he is really saying that you're just not putting out enough as an employee here. But he really doesn't give her any direction. He wants her to wear more buttons but maybe that's not what he is after.*

I asked the participants what they saw as their responsibility as supervisors when workers do not meet expectations. The first response was from Li, who said she would look at how the job was structured and ask if expectations were too high. Her response recognized that factors besides workers' abilities and attitudes impact their work performance. It is often automatically assumed that workers who do not meet performance expectations either lack the knowledge and skills to do the job or have a poor attitude (e.g. they're lazy, they're resistant to change).

Other responses to my question about supervisors' responsibility in helping workers to meet expectations included mentoring, coaching, providing the proper training and tools to do the job (e.g. procedures manual), adjusting the job duties of workers within a team based on individual team members' skills, and finding out from employees if there are any barriers, including personal problems, that are affecting their performance.

For me, one of the most interesting and revealing comments made during this discussion was whether it is enough for workers to meet expectations or whether they

are expected to do more. In the scene from *Office Space*, the worker was wearing fifteen pieces of flair, the minimum expectation according to company policy; yet her supervisor was pushing her to wear more. Kim appeared to pick up on this and made the following comment about what is often *really* expected of workers.

> *Kim: I think that there is an unwritten rule that you expect people to go above and beyond what you've outlined as your basic expectations, so I don't think that we are being honest as a department or as an organization about what we're expecting. We say, "Oh yeah, this is what we want." But in fact we want something above and beyond.*
> *Li: That's right.*
> *Kim: And so I think it starts right there.*

Going "above and beyond" was almost always framed as working overtime without being asked and not expecting to be compensated for it. The participants' collective agreement states that overtime must be authorized by the employer before it is worked and that it must be mutually agreed upon by the employer and employee. It further defines how overtime must be calculated and compensated. Clearly the practice here (not compensating workers for overtime) contradicts the collective agreement. Li commented that when staff work overtime without being asked and compensated, it "*creates a lot of ill-will among other workers who really feel that they should be able to work their thirty-five hour week and not feel that they need to work that extra time.*" It creates divisiveness among fellow workers who are also fellow union members, which is contrary to the union's interest because it reduces solidarity. Tacit acceptance of this practice by workers and supervisors also increases management's control over the work process, while placing in-scope supervisors at the fault line in the "enacted" collective agreement.

Promotions

Everyone in the group agreed that workers should not be penalized for not going above and beyond expectations, but acknowledged that workers who do not

tend to be overlooked in promotion decisions and are treated with less "flexibility" than those who do. Examples of flexibility given by the participants included allowing workers to adjust the times that they start and end their workday, allowing workers to work a compressed work week, and giving workers a day off but not requiring them to use their vacation time.

> *Bevin: You can't treat everybody the same. Like in our office, sometimes I might take an hour and a half lunch but everybody knows that I start work at 7:00 and leave at 5:30. And then you have the person who might be complaining that I'm taking an hour and a half lunch and who works from 8:15 to 4:15. It would never occur to them to stay to 4:30 and if they did stay to 4:30 they would expect overtime. So you shouldn't be treating that person with the same flexibility with someone like with what I just explained.*
>
> *Chris: I think that every supervisor has a bare minimum that you compare everybody to and whether or not they are doing the job. Some people will far exceed that job...and some people will stay exactly at what they have to do. That's sometimes hard to discover until the employee's been there for about a year as to which way they are going to go – whether they want to keep going up or whether they are a nine to five type person that comes in to do their job and then goes home but isn't willing to do anything above that. I can't really blame the person. If they are doing their job, doing what they have to do, what's in the description, then how can you say that they're not doing what they are suppose to do? They probably won't move anywhere but maybe they don't want to.*

It is interesting to juxtapose Chris's comment with the following comment that she made latter: "*...everybody has a life outside of work...I mean, kids get sick, cars break down. People have other lives.*" Embedded in Chris's first comment – "*whether they want to keep going up*", "*isn't willing to do anything above,*" "*but maybe they don't want to*" – was the notion that being promoted within the workplace is largely a matter of individual desire and effort. This recalls the neo-liberal view that "personal choice is the only limit to opportunity" (Government of Alberta, 2004, p. 15). This view ignores reasons besides personal choice, such as family or community commitments, that explain why some workers do not work beyond their "normal"

working hours. Chris's latter comment, however, did recognize and accept that workers have commitments and priorities outside of work. I found the two comments somewhat contradictory. This contradiction reveals the degree to which, as Brookfield (2001) puts it, neo-liberalism has come to live within us (p. 16) and how the discourse that dominates the vast majority of current management theory and practice shapes people's everyday thoughts and actions, often without their awareness.

Most participants appeared to tacitly accept the idea that to be promoted employees must be work above and beyond stated expectations. Their acceptance may be due in large part to the fact that this idea reflected their own experiences. As noted in the previous section, it was common practice within the Prairie Learning Institute (PLI) to promote rank-and-file workers into supervisory positions. This was a recurring theme in the literature on supervision of employees. According to Robbins et al. (2002), one reason organizations promote from within is to motivate employees to exceed performance expectations (p. 11).

The film scenes from *Norma Rae* and *Bread and Roses* both touched on the issue of promotion. (See Appendix A for the script of the scenes.) In *Norma Rae*, promotion was a means to attempt to silence and control an out-spoken worker. The plant manager told Norma that she had a big mouth – she advocated on behalf of her fellow workers – and that he was promoting her "to close that mouth." In *Bread and Roses,* Berta was offered a promotion on the condition that she would disclose who among her fellow workers organized a meeting with a union representative. The promise of a promotion was used in an effort to prevent the unionization of the workplace, which is often seen as a threat to management power to control the work process.

The issue of promotion, on which the participants' collective agreement is silent, represents a tension between union and management ideology. Many unionists believe that promotions should be based upon seniority because seniority is an objective measure and prevents favouritism from creeping into the decision making process. Others argue that to ensure the most qualified person is chosen, promotions should be based on performance and an interest in management: "What criteria do management tend to use in deciding whom to promote to supervisor? Employees with good work records and an interest in management tend to be favoured" (p. 12). In my view, some workers may perceive that one of the ways they can demonstrate an interest in management is by working overtime without being asked and without expecting compensation. According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, "working off the clock" is a long and hidden practice that appears to be spreading: "Though there have been no formal studies of the practice and its overall cost to employees, the workers interviewed (for the article) said off-the-clock work took place at a variety of companies" (Greenhouse, 2004, Section 1, para. 9). The author argues that one of the main reasons why employees work off the clock is because they are "told it is the way people advance in a company" (Section 2, para. 1). Unlike the collective agreement for supervisors and rank-and-file workers, PLI managers' collective agreement is silent on the issue of overtime. Some of the research participants said they knew many managers who worked longer hours than they were actually compensated for. The willingness by some workers to do the same seems to me to indicate that they see it as a way to demonstrate their interest in management.

I thought about what was discussed during the first group interview about promotions, what the literature on supervision of employees says about this issue, what I had observed in the film scenes from *Norma Rae* and *Bread and Roses,* and the

tension between union and management ideology on this issue. At the second group interview, I raised the issue of promotion again and asked the research participants specifically what they believe are the reasons workers are promoted into supervisory positions. They spoke again about working above and beyond stated performance expectations, but they gave other reasons as well, including seniority.

> *Chris: Often I think it's the longer you've been there. The person that's been there the longest gets promoted to supervisor, which isn't always the best person to be the supervisor. That seems to be the way it goes.*
> *Bevin: In our office, it tends to be more if you're a go getter. If you are always thinking beyond and you're thinking outside of the box and that kind of stuff, then it makes a difference.*
> *Li: And you work beyond what's expected of you.*

> *Mo: My manager has a definite vision of the right kind of people to have working in our office. She wants positive people who are team players and have a reasonably mature vision of life. It doesn't matter how well you do the job. If you can't 'fit in' with the team, she'd prefer you left. As far as promotions, upgrading, etc., you need to make sure you are someone she wants, as well as make sure she is aware of the fact that you are ready for more responsibility.*

Some of the research participants' promotions into supervisory positions were the result of their existing position being reclassified to a supervisory position.

> *Li: So I think that some people work their way into these positions and some of them were maybe doing that kind of work and then were reclassified to higher levels...It just turns out that maybe your job is required to be more of a supervisory position and therefore you're already doing that kind of work and they just give you that extra grade level or whatever.*
> *Mo: That's basically what happened to me.*
> *Nat: That's very true…that happened to me.*

What the discussion on the issue of promotion reveals is that practices can and do vary throughout the PLI. The research participants' experiences are not homogeneous. Their experiences showed that workers are promoted for a variety reasons. That being said, it seemed to me that they perceived that one of the main reasons workers were promoted was if they demonstrated a willingness to work off the clock. From a critical perspective, this is an example of a cultural practice that

serves the interests of employers over the interests of workers and unions. It can also be seen as a subtle way to control workers because if workers believe that to advance within the organization they must be willing to work off the clock, then that is what some of them will do.

Being active in the union

A question raised in my mind by the discussions regarding expectations of employees and promotions was whether having an interest in management might prevent some workers from becoming active in their union. Because unions and employers have different and often conflicting interests, workers interested in advancing into supervisory or management positions within an organization might believe that if they become active in their union, management will perceive that they are aligning themselves with the union against management.

To explore this question, I asked the research participants if they felt that in-scope supervisors could be active in the Public Employees' Union (PEU). While they acknowledged that the former president of the PEU was an in-scope supervisor, most believed that being active in the PEU would jeopardize them if they wanted to move into management.

> *Chris: It might jeopardize if you want to move up.*
>
> *Nat: I have this idea in my mind, and I don't know if it's true, that if you become actively involved in the union you are running the risk of maybe not having the potential of moving into a management position.*
> *Li: I don't think that's true.*
> *Nat: I don't know if that's the reality but it...*
> *Li: The activists in our union have all moved up where I work. And one...*
> *Nat: Into management positions?*
> *Li: One of them is a manager now. He was a steward or a rep when I first started there.*
> *Nat: It's a perception and that's why I don't know if it's true.*

The only person in the research group who had ever been active in the PEU was Li, although it was not during the six months that she was seconded to an in-scope supervisor position. She saw union involvement as a positive learning experience.

> *Li: It's actually a good way to find out what's going on in the (PLI). If you sit on the executive of the union, you'll find out stuff you'll never find out any other way. It's a very good learning process. I was amazed because just...going to a meeting, you don't really learn all that much but you sit in on the executive meetings and you see the correspondence and you see everything that's happening...and it really helps you to appreciate where you work.*

Li also told a story of a co-worker (not a supervisor) who was heavily involved in the PEU and the result she perceived it to have had.

> *Li: If you ever want anybody to start drumming you out of the (PLI), that might be one way of doing it.*
> *Bevin: Is to start being involved in the union?*
> *Li: Yeah, **heavily** involved in the union in order to be constantly away from the workplace and therefore build up some resentment on part of management.*
> *Bevin: Yeah, I believe that.*
> *Li: Because quite often that will happen, and you do spend a lot of time because of the union contract and the arrangements that are made for you when you serve on the executive. It's not like you get a hiatus away from your work so you can work on this position full-time. You have to just continue working in your job and also fit this work in. And so with this particular person, where she was working I guess the resentment levels were really high and they just gradually started giving her less work to do...so she approached this saying that this is constructive dismissal and actually got a buy out from the organization.*

Whether workers who become active in their union actually incur the resentment of management and risk opportunities for promotion or not, the perception was that they do. This perception serves to control workers, benefit management, and works against the interests of workers and unions. For example, unions suffer when their members are not active because member involvement is an effective way to build the union. Workers lose the democratic opportunity to have their voices heard within an organization that represents their interests. In addition, workers miss

valuable informal learning opportunities that being active in their union can offer, as Li's comments above indicate.

I am aware of an organization in the private sector that actively promotes employees who have served on the union executive into management. Union involvement is seen as a "good career move" if one's goal is to move into management. I told the research participants about this organization. Chris questioned the impact of this practice on the union.

> *Chris: Is that also a way of keeping the union from ever really doing anything?*
> *Researcher: Could be.*
> *Chris: Yeah, because if you're just using it as a steppingstone to get into management, then you're not really doing what you should be doing for the union, I would think.*

Chris's question and comment recognized that unions and management often have different and conflicting interests, and that the practice of recruiting employees who serve on the union executive into management can be a way for the employer to control the union if some of those employees act in a way to please management rather in a way that serves the interests of the union membership.

What it means to be a union member

If some in-scope supervisors are hesitant about becoming active in their union, what do they believe it means to be union members? My sense is that most union members know the rights and benefits that union membership affords them (e.g. higher wages, better benefits, increased job security). I also believe that most unionized workers know what their responsibilities and obligations are to their employers. But what about to their unions? I tried to find an answer to this question by searching the labour studies literature and the websites of major unions (e.g. Canadian Union of Public Employees, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Canadian Autoworkers) but I found nothing. So at

the second group interview, I asked the participants what it meant to them to belong to the PEU, not in terms of their rights but in terms of their responsibilities and obligations. Only Li directly responded to this question. She said union members have a responsibility to know and not to step outside of their collective agreement. The example Li used was working overtime without be asked and without being compensated for it.

> *Li: Our responsibility as union members is to make sure that we're not working beyond our working hours to try and get jobs done where maybe there's an unrealistic workload expected. When people leave positions, their positions are not filled and whoever is left behind somehow has to share or take on those extra duties and there's always some resentment when there may be one or two people staying longer to try and get all of this work done. And so your responsibility then as a union member is to say look, you know you work a thirty-five hour week and if you're doing a reasonably good job, you shouldn't have to work longer and if you are working longer, you should be asked to work longer and you should be compensated at overtime rates... Workload was identified as a really big issue in the union and so that's one responsibility that you have as a member, is not to make things worse by stepping out of your working hours to work longer than you should when other people maybe are working just as hard as you are but they're leaving on time...*
> *Nat: But is that a responsibility of the actual employee or the manager, because that's where it's kind of...*
> *Li: Well that's where it becomes difficult because maybe the manager is just not managing properly by not filling positions but they're also in financial crunches and they use those vacant positions... So it is a difficult kind of situation, and you might just say, yes, it's the manager's fault. But you have a responsibility as well. You're in a contract of employment. You have a contract of employment that spells out what your working conditions are, what's expected of you and you should be fulfilling that contract but you should not be jeopardizing your fellow workers by making it worse for them by stepping outside that contract.*

Not all of the research participants agreed with Li's comments, but I believe that she had an important point. She recognized that many public sector managers are in difficult situations financially and that one way they deal with budget shortfalls is by not filling vacant positions. This practice allows them to divert the salary for those positions to other areas of the budget; however, the work often still needs to be done.

Some workers' willingness to take on more and to work overtime without being compensated facilitates this practice. However, as Li noted, that can lead to resentment within the work unit between those who work off the clock and those who do not for whatever reason. In my view, this practice of not filling vacant positions then redistributing the work to others who must work overtime to get it done has become widespread and accepted in many organizations. While I understand the difficult financial situations that many public sector managers are in, workers did not create these situations; yet they are expected to play a significant role in resolving them. This practice perpetuates chronic financial problems rather than resolves them. It also often creates other problems, such as employee burnout.

Besides Li, no one else responded to my question about what they saw as their responsibilities and obligations as union members. However, when I asked what they would do if they saw something happen or about to happen that they knew contravened the terms and conditions of their collective agreement, all indicated that they would bring the matter to their manager's attention. For example, Bevin told the story of a senior manager who wanted to dismiss a rank-and-file worker without going through the procedures stated in the collective agreement. The worker's supervisor told the senior manager, *"you can't do that."* Some participants indicated that they saw this as protecting not only the workers they supervised, but also their managers because an action that contravenes the collective agreement could result in a grievance. Yet not compensating employees who work overtime contravenes the collective agreement. So here is an interesting contradiction: some practices that "break the rules" are accepted while others are not.

Perhaps the reason some participants did not respond to my question about what it means for them to be union members in terms of their responsibilities and

obligations was because they did not identify with the PEU. Bevin wondered how many workers are truly aware of and appreciate the work that the PEU does.

> *Bevin: But I'd be curious to know how many staff really even want the union. I don't know, maybe I'm naïve but for me I bet you there's less people that want the union than...*
> *Li: It's kind of hard for people to speak for the people who never come to meetings though.*
> *Bevin: But that's an example to me, though...Because when you see how many people go to the meetings out of how many members you have, it's nothing. It's embarrassing...You're interested if you read the newsletter and there happens to be something in there that they're cutting part of your benefits or your, you know, what kind of a raise are we getting. But by and large the rest of it?*

When I specifically asked the participants if they preferred to be unionized or not, all agreed that it was to their advantage to be unionized.

> *Li: I think it's better than the alternative.*
> *Nat: Oh yeah, I agree.*
> *Bevin: I can't imagine not having one. That would be awful.*

With the exception of Li, I found that the participants' support for unionization was primarily instrumental rather than ideological. They gave three main reasons for supporting unionization: wages tend to be higher in unionized workplaces than in non-unionized workplaces; the benefits are also almost always better; and there is more job security because the reasons for terminating a worker's employment are more restrictive and less arbitrary than in non-unionized workplaces, and the process is longer and more complex. Thus, on the one hand the participants recognized and appreciated the economic benefits of belonging to the PEU. On the other hand, they expressed reluctance about becoming active in the PEU and therefore miss out on potential social and political benefits that being active in a union can bring, such as opportunities to participate in democratic decision making and to learn from and with other members. This instrumental view of unions is not surprising given that the focus of most North American unions is their industrial and

professional goals, as opposed to political and social justice goals (Naylor, 2002), the latter being ideological in nature.

Supervising in a unionized workplace

The issue of supervising in a unionized workplace arose from a discussion about what supervisors can do to retain workers, which is discussed in this chapter's themes section. I asked the participants whether they felt that it was more difficult to supervise in a unionized workplace than a non-unionized workplace. I had thought about this question when reviewing the employee supervision literature. There is an underlying assumption within this literature that unionization make supervisors' jobs more difficult because there are more – and more complex – regulations that they must understand and follow (for example, see Jennings, 1993). I wondered about whether rather than being a hindrance, a collective agreement might be helpful in terms of providing supervisors with an easily accessible set of principles and rules from which to operate.

The participants' responses were mixed. First, some said that there are instances when being a supervisor in a unionized workplace can be difficult.

> *Chris: The collective agreement can work both ways. You can have employees who will read the agreement and then take it to the letter of law, right? I've been in a situation where I had an employee who said, "We get ten sick days. I'm taking ten sick days because that's my right, that's in the agreement." I mean, that's not what they're there for. They're there if you need them...(So) you can have situations where the employee who is taking all the advantages of the agreement is poisoning all the other staff in the office to do the same, right?*

However, there was agreement that the vast majority of workers do not "abuse" the collective agreement, and those who do tend to be the ones with whom supervisors have the most problems.

Some participants noted that, on the other hand, having a collective agreement can be helpful because it provides a framework of regulations and consequences in which to work.

> *Mo: (The collective agreement) gives you a format to work in if you're having problems as well. Okay, what do I do with this person who's not performing up to scratch or coming to work late...How do I do it?*

At the second group interview, I asked a question specifically about the limits the collective agreement puts on in-scope supervisors' authority to discipline a worker. As explained in the first section of this chapter, the collective agreement prohibits a PEU member from disciplining a fellow member. Disciplinary action against an employee can only be taken by someone out of scope, usually a manager. I asked the group whether they saw this as positive or negative. Some responded that it depended on whether or not they were supported by their manager. If not, then the limits on their authority could have negative consequences. Chris told a story of when she gave an employee an unsatisfactory performance review and then her manager met with the employee and changed it.

> *Chris: And so it ended up being a real conflict because what you were told to do and told to say to the employee, then when it came time for the manager's say, they came off looking like the good person and you were the bad supervisor.*
> *Researcher: So you weren't actually taking disciplinary action but giving a negative performance review that could lead to disciplinary action?*
> *Chris: Yeah.*
> *Researcher: And then your manager changed it?*
> *Chris: Yeah.*

Chris's experience reflects one of the contradictions of being an in-scope supervisor. Her position as supervisor gave her authority over the workers she supervised but that authority was limited by her in-scope status because the collective agreement prohibited one member from disciplining another. Li commented that if the manager did not concur with a supervisor's evaluation of an employee's job

performance and changed it, then perhaps the manager should write the performance review with the supervisor's input. However, as Bevin astutely pointed out, "*by doing that, you're not in your staff's minds, their supervisor.*"

Assessing workers' job performance

The question of whether supervisors in non-unionized workplaces have more flexibility than their counterparts in unionized workplaces led to a discussion about assessing workers' job performance. This issue was raised several times during the two group interviews. Described below are the participants' concerns with the PLI's performance assessment system and practices. As noted in the first section of this chapter, many of the rules governing performance assessment are spelled out in the participants' collective agreement (e.g. all employee must receive feedback on their performance annually). Breaching those rules could result in a grievance.

One concern the participants had with the performance assessment system related to the words supervisors must use to rate workers' performance for their annual review – unsatisfactory, satisfactory, very good or excellent. "Satisfactory" means the employee meets the expectations of the job; "unsatisfactory" that the employee does not meet expectations; "very good" that an employee occasionally exceeds expectations; and "excellent" that an employee consistently exceeds expectations. The research participants saw these definitions as problematic.

> *Chris: Those definitions are awful because excellent means that you are always exceeding your job requirements.*
> *Bevin: What do you strive for if you're excellent all the time?*
> *Li: Yeah, I got one like that. Last year I was excellent but this year I'm just very good.*
> *Chris: That's enough to kill you.*
> *Li: So what have I done differently?*
> *Chris: That's a step down.*
> *Li: I thought I was working the same way, you know? I couldn't see the difference.*
> *Bevin: You have to be really careful...For example, in my situation the person that I supervise is doing really, really well now. But I have to*

be really careful because I can't go from satisfactory all the way to excellent. And then where do I go after that?

According to the participants' collective agreement, performance assessments should focus on defining performance expectations, recognizing employees' contributions, and identifying areas for improvement. However, by forcing supervisors to give workers' performance a rating, the annual review can be demoralizing for some workers even if their supervisor rated their performance better than satisfactory, as Li's experience demonstrated. She found the experience demoralizing because her rating dropped from excellent to very good. The reasons were not clear to her; she perceived her performance as consistent from one year to the next.

A second concern raised was the difficulty of giving a worker more than a single increment (1.0) even if the supervisor rated the worker's performance as very good or excellent. Li commented that the supervisor "*really has to back it up, to say that you really performed exceptionally well...I've had other people talk to me and say 'I've never had a multiple increment. They don't give multiple increments.*'" The reason it is difficult for a supervisor to give an employee 1.5 or 2.0 is because the PLI provides each department with only enough funding for 1.0 per employee per year. If a supervisor wants to give an employee 1.5 or 2.0, the dollar amount for the extra half or full increment must come from another part of the department's budget. Some participants indicated that they found it difficult to convince their managers to permit them to give workers more than 1.0 for this reason. They indicated that it was also very difficult to deny workers an annual increment even if they were not performing satisfactorily, because this disciplinary action exposed the department to the risk of a grievance.

A third concern raised about the performance assessment system was if the supervisor did not complete workers' annual reviews one month before their anniversary date, employees automatically received an increment regardless of their performance.

> *Bevin: The part that bothers me is that everybody gets an increment. Period...You get an increment even if the supervisor hasn't done your evaluation. It's just an automatic thing...you have people come up to you and say, "When I get my increment," and it's not even that you have to perform.*

The reason this policy was put into place was because some supervisors and managers were not completing employees' annual reviews on time, thereby affecting their income. This relates to the final problem identified by participants: that performance appraisals were not taken seriously by all managers and supervisors within the PLI.

> *Chris: I didn't have appraisals for years or when I did receive one it would be a cut and paste from the year before.*
> *Bevin: Well that's how ours was too.*
> *Li: Well we used to have an issue of them not being done on time.*
> *Chris: Yeah, exactly.*
> *Li: ...You do need to know, you do need to have some feedback of how you are doing year to year.*
> *Multiple voices: Yeah.*
> *Li: You know, if these things have to be done, they have to be done...What happens ten years down the road if someone hasn't given you one?*
> *Multiple voices: Exactly.*
> *Li: And you're not performing well. Well, where's the evidence going to be?*
> *Chris: There isn't any.*

This problem of performance assessments not being taken seriously created some very difficult situations for the research participants. They shared stories of supervising workers whom they perceived did not meet expectations yet their previous supervisors had given them satisfactory performance reviews.

> *Kim: Shortly after I started in my position I had someone transfer from another area of our department who was doing a very similar job and*

her performance appraisal from the previous year was glowing. But she is terrible. And I've since found out from her former supervisor that, "Oh yeah. I just said that so could get rid of her."
Bevin: Oh great.
Kim: And so now when I gave her my performance appraisal she was totally floored. Couldn't believe what I had to tell her, totally defensive and it's because no one wanted to be honest with her.

The former supervisor's unwillingness to be honest with the employee created a real problem for Kim in terms of her relationship with the employee because the employee perceived that her performance was "glowing." Chris shared a similar experience that she said ended up being "*written off as a personality conflict*" between her and the person she supervised.

Chris: Just after I became a supervisor there was a woman in the office who ended up being a real discipline problem. And when we started going down the road of addressing these problems which her previous supervisor had not addressed at all, she brought forward four pages of sticky notes that whenever this other supervisor, whenever somebody did a good job, she'd given them a little sticky note that said, "Great job. Good stuff."
Li: Oh my gosh.
Chris: And she kept them.
Researcher: So that was the only evidence there was of her performance?
Chris: That's right. And so she'd say, how can you be saying these things about my work? Look at what I got...(It was a) situation where it was kind of a cut and paste performance appraisal for a person every year and then when I came in I started addressing the concerns that were there, right away it was written off as a personality conflict.
Bevin: I think that happens a lot.
Chris: Yup, and it ends up a problem between just you and her.
Kim: Right.

Some supervisors are uncomfortable with telling workers that their job performance does not meet expectations, particularly if they have never received any kind of training or guidance on how to provide "negative" feedback. However, not providing constructive and honest feedback is unfair not only to workers' future supervisors, but to workers' themselves, which the participants recognized. For

example, Kim commented about her experience that it was not the employee's fault because she thought that she was meeting performance expectations.

The participants also recognized that in addition to providing honest feedback, they have a responsibility to explore with workers the reasons why they might not be meeting expectations, and to be open to the very likely possibility that it might be due to factors beyond their control (e.g. performance expectations are too high, the resources workers require to perform satisfactorily are unavailable).

A feature of the performance appraisal system the participants did not question, however, was linking workers' performance with pay; that is, using salary increments either to reward workers for performance deemed to exceed expectations or to punish workers for performance deemed to fall below expectations. According to Crow (1996), research dating back to "at least 1960 has shown consistently that attempting to measure performance and tie pay to performance is futile, and can actually hurt performance" (p. 62).

Recognition

The issue of managers taking credit for the work of others arose from *9 to 5*, the final clip we watched. (See Appendix A for the script of the scenes.)

> *Bevin: That does happen.*
> *Multiple voices: Yeah.*
> *Li: Has it ever happened to anyone here?*
> *Mo: Yes.*
> *Nat: I think it's probably happened to everyone. I mean, I know it's happened definitely in the past for me. It doesn't happen right now but because it's happened in the past, with the people I supervise right now, anything that they have done, I make sure that everyone knows that they did that. People will thank me because they know I'm...responsible for the area, and I'll say, "Wasn't me."*
> *Mo: It was the team.*
> *Nat: Yeah, or I'll identify who did it.*
>
> *Chris: I think we all kind of face not getting credit for the way the office is run. Because it always goes back to the manager and it's always "Oh, your office is running and functioning so well and*

everything else." Well I don't know about everyone else's manager but really how much involvement do they have in the day-to-day workings of the office, that keep it running and keep people happy and everything else. The places I've been in, it's almost none.
Bevin: Some of them don't really even know what you do.

Nat's experience is a clear example of learning; it shaped the type of supervisor he became. I discuss his experience further in the next chapter. An important point I want to make here, though, is Nat's story of his manager taking credit for his work and Chris's comments about credit always going to the manager show that the participants shared common experiences with rank-and-file workers and these experiences created solidarity bonds. These solidarity bonds were strengthened by the belief that supervisors and workers are part of a team, a perception that I found was held by all participants.

One of the potential consequences of workers not getting credit their work identified by the participants was the impact on a worker's ability to advance in the organization.

Chris: If you're in a situation where you want to try to move up in the organization and your boss is the one who is always getting all the credit for the stuff that you really did.
Li: Yeah, how is anyone going to know what you did?
Chris: Yeah, and then how do you move up? It's them that's moving up because they're getting credit for all these wonderful things.
Li: And does it get recognized anywhere? In your appraisals or anywhere? It's just like it walked out the door.

While the participants recognized that it was unfair for recognition of work done in their work units to go to their manager and not rank-and-file workers and themselves, they accepted that "*those kinds of things happen.*" They attempted to deal with workers' subsequent resentment by personally recognizing and praising them for their work.

Summary

This analysis of issues raised and discussed by the research participants reveals some of the tensions and contradictions of being an in-scope supervisor. For example, the discussion of employee expectations and promotions revealed an unwritten rule within the PLI; namely, workers who exceeded expectations by working overtime without being compensated tended to be the ones who were promoted, while those who did not work off the clock were often overlooked in promotion decisions. This unwritten rule contradicts the participants' own collective agreement, yet it was tacitly accepted perhaps in part because it reflected their own experiences. However, by uncritically accepting this unwritten rule as natural, as supervisors the participants were not abiding by the written rules negotiated by management and the PEU. In addition, it was noted by Li that when some workers work overtime without being compensated while others do not for whatever reason, the results can be ill-will and divisiveness among the work group, problems in-scope supervisors try to resolve.

Another interesting contradiction emerged from the discussion about being active in the union. The participants clearly recognized the economic advantages of unionization – namely, wages, benefits and job security. It was for those reasons that they unequivocally supported being unionized. At the same time, they expressed a great deal of reluctance about becoming actively involved in the PEU because they believed that management would perceive them as aligning themselves with the union against management. They believed that this perception would harm their chances of moving into a management position. By not becoming involved in their union, however, the participants miss out on some of the other advantages that unionization has to offer, such as the opportunity to learn with and from fellow union members.

The limits the participants' collective agreement placed on their authority is another contradiction of being an in-scope supervisor. If the participants felt that an employee should be disciplined (as defined in their collective agreement), they needed the support and approval of their manager; yet as Chris's experience showed, that support was sometimes lacking. Therefore, the participants were restricted in how they were able to deal with problems in the workplace.

Finally, the discussion about recognition points to another tension associated with being an in-scope supervisor; that is, the opposing pulls of solidarity bonds with workers. On the one hand, supervisors shared similar experiences and feelings with workers, and felt the solidarity of being members of the same union; on the other, supervisors found themselves in roles that demanded of them practices of surveillance, control and discipline of workers, imposing managerial decisions on workers. I discuss this tension further in the following themes section, which highlights additional supervisor tensions and contradictions.

Themes emerging in the conversations

In the previous section, I presented and discussed specific topics taken up during the group interviews. I now turn to the themes and sub-themes identified through analysis of the group interviews. According to Ely (1991), a theme "can be thought of as the researcher's inferred statement that highlights explicit or implicit attitudes toward life, behaviour, or understandings of a person, persons, or culture" (p. 150).

Themes and sub-themes related to learning are discussed in the next chapter. In this section, I present three other themes. The first relates to the research participants' location within the Prairie Learning Institute (PLI). Throughout both group interviews, the research participants spoke about feeling "stuck in the middle."

The second speaks to participants' work identity as blurred and shifting. The final theme relates to participants' relationships with former co-workers changing when they moved into their supervisory positions.

"We're kind of stuck in the middle"

During both group interviews, the participants spoke about feeling caught in the middle – between the workers they supervised and their managers, various organizational structures and practices, and their union. For example, managers' actions, such as "changing the rules," reversing supervisors' decisions, excluding supervisors from the decision making process, and being unsupportive of supervisors in dealing with problems, resulted in participants feeling caught between managers and the staff they supervised. In this section I discuss these and other factors. It is important to note, however, that they are not mutually exclusive; in other words, the interplay of managers' actions and a particular organizational structure or practice, for example, resulted in supervisors feeling caught in the middle.

- A target for dissatisfaction coming from below and above

A common perception held by the participants was that managers often did not understand the challenges workers faced and the impact that managerial decisions had in the workplace. They indicated that they were often not consulted in decision-making but were the ones who had to implement them. If the decision was unpopular with the workers, they were the ones who had to deal with workers' dissatisfaction. If the decision was difficult to implement, they were the ones who had to explain to their managers why, for example, a deadline needed to be extended.

> *Mo: Most supervisors have done the job of the people they're supervising. They implicitly understand the frustrations of the job. However, for the most part, supervisors are reporting to managers who have very little understanding of the job. We're kind of stuck in the middle. We need to sympathize, empathize, mentor, teach, discipline and all manner of other things, our teams. At the same time,*

> *we have to take our positions forward to the managers who simply don't have the capacity to understand our viewpoints. My past experience has been that upper managers make decisions on a whim and then expect supervisors to implement changes without taking their needs into consideration. Supervisors are seldom consulted. It drives me nuts! How can you make major changes in my department without at least asking for my input or, on the other hand, ignoring any suggestions I might make as to why something would work, and latter asking why they were never told.*

Mo's comments clearly show the tensions that many supervisors experience, whether they are in-scope or not. Supervisors are responsible for putting into action managerial decisions, yet they are often not involved in making those decisions even though they may have a better understanding of the potential impacts. In addition, supervisors often do not have the authority to change decisions even when problems result from them. Their choices of action are restricted, and they are often the targets of dissatisfaction and frustration coming from both workers and managers.

- Dealing with inequalities

The participants felt caught in the middle when workers complained about inequalities between managers' terms and conditions of work and their own. A specific example raised was hours of work. The collective agreement for rank-and-file workers and supervisors spells out both the number of hours they must work in a day and the number of hours they must work in a week, whereas managers' collective agreement is silent on the issue of hours of work. Some research participants indicated that many workers perceived this disparity as unfair, and that resentment built up when managers would "*show up for work later, leave early, and take long lunch breaks*." The participants, as supervisors, were the ones who had to deal with this resentment.

> *Chris: I think with the division of unions here...and time being calculated differently for both areas, that sometimes it's really difficult because the workers are expected to be here for certain hours and it seems like the managers kind of come and go as they want and are*

suppose to make up hours. They may be in on weekends and putting in extra time but the workers don't see that. So what you get from your employees is that your manager is not setting the example for you sort of thing. So I think that's really hard.
Nat: I've seen this as a problem a lot of people feel...
Researcher: So how do you deal with workers' resentment?
Chris: It's really hard because you can't really justify anything the manager does. All you can do is try to set the example yourself. "Well I'm here. I'm your supervisor so I'm the one you should be watching."...If the managers are never there and they're leaving early and taking hour and a half lunches, then that's what people are seeing. And I often think it will make the rest of the staff think, "Well if they're not into it and they don't have to be here and be interested in what we're doing, why should I be?"
Multiple voices: Yeah.
Chris: So that's kind of the way it flows down the line and you're the one caught in the middle trying to deal with that.

In addition to role modelling expected behaviour, some participants did say they tried to justify managers' behaviour as a way of dealing with workers' resentment.

Mo: I've had to justify this type of thing before, but I just say something along the line of, "Do you think they (managers) get paid to attend functions they have to go to? They don't get paid extra to go away for two weeks and spend twelve-hour days at conferences."

Worker resentment was not the only problem resulting from managers working "irregular" hours. Chris commented that she often felt like she was "*always waiting for things to happen*" because when a decision was needed from her manager, "*you don't know when they're going to be there, when the decision can be made.*"

- Managers' positional power

The research participants indicated that as supervisors they also felt caught in the middle when managers seemingly arbitrarily changed their own directives in certain situations, reversed supervisors' decisions, and "borrowed" workers they supervised for other work without considering the impact. Because managers are in a position of power relative to supervisors, the participants felt limited in dealing with the problems created by such actions. For example, Chris described an experience

when her manager reversed a decision she thought they had agreed up. They had decided that an employee Chris supervised would receive an unsatisfactory performance rating, which meant that she would not receive an annual increment. Chris met with the employee to discuss her performance. However, when the manager met with the employee, the manager changed the performance rating so that she would receive an increment. She did not consult with Chris about this beforehand. Chris was frustrated because she felt that she ended up looking like the "*bad supervisor*" and the manager the "*good person.*" Mo commented that if her manager ever acted in a similar manner, she would ask her manager "*to put in writing the action she wanted.*" She also suggested documenting any incidents and giving a copy to the manager "*and her boss just so it doesn't come back to bite you.*" While these strategies can help supervisors to protect themselves, they are still the ones who must deal with the impact on workers and their work units. In addition, such formality might have unintended consequences on relations between supervisors and managers; for example, it could lead to suspicion and lack of trust.

- Inflating job requirements

Some reasons participants gave for feeling "stuck in the middle" were primarily systemic; that is, they had to do with organizational structures and practices. The system and practices related to assessing workers' job performance was one example they gave, which I discussed in the previous section. Another example was the job evaluation system. The participants felt caught in trying to negotiate a system that permits the educational requirements for a position to be understated in the position evaluation process, but overstated in the hiring process.

As explained in the first section of this chapter, the PLI uses the Aiken system to evaluate positions. Formal education and training required is one of the factors

considered in determining a job's grade level and salary. The greater the level of education and training stated in the position description, the more points the job receives and the higher the salary range. However, when hiring for a position, the PLI allows managers to ask for a higher level of education than what is actually stated in the position description. According to the participants, this practice resulted in the educational requirements for some positions not only being overstated in the job advertisement, but also being understated in the description submitted to evaluate the position to keep the grade level and thus the salary low.

> *Li: Sometimes the bottom line is how much they really want to pay. We've got positions in our department that will say the minimum requirements for education are high school. Well we know full well having worked with people for many, many years that experience is probably really important and it wouldn't hurt to have a degree...And so we hire quite often very, very different...But part of the reason why they do that is because they don't want those job levels to be higher than they are because they don't want to have to pay more. And I think that's the bottom line in some cases.*

The participants indicated that it was common practice within the PLI for managers to require workers to have post-secondary education even though it was not required to do the job.

> *Mo: We've had an on-going argument with our director about that because very few of the jobs in our department need a degree to actually do the job. I complain and all that kind of thing, but our director insists that everyone who is hired...has to have a degree.*

> *Bevin: It's the organization that's pushing us. I mean every position in our office, including the receptionist, you have to have a degree...Why would you go to university and get a four-year degree and be a receptionist?*

At the macro level, the practice of inflating a job's educational requirements contributes to the growth of underemployment – a problem that has been well documented (for example, see Livingstone, 1999). At the micro level – that is, within

the participants' daily work – this practice created a "paradoxical" situation that they were left to deal with.

> *Kim: It makes it very difficult to attract the kind of person you are looking for when you are trying to balance between the low job scale and the high amount of education that you are asking for. It's paradoxical. You can't. It makes it very difficult. When you find one of those great people, you hang on to them for dear life.*

> *Li: If you really undervalue the work that is being done in some positions, you lose people that are really good at it. And we've had that happen...We hire really well educated, very good people...and then the first opportunity they get to go somewhere else, they go, because they are very motivated, they work very hard, they know they are going to get a very good job. And they'll go somewhere else. So you lose people sometimes that you would like to be attracting.*

- Educational requirements and mismatches

Losing "good" workers was not the only problem resulting from the practices of understating the educational requirements for a job for position evaluation and overstating them for hiring. They also resulted in hiring people whose qualifications did not match the requirements of the job.

> *Mo: One of the first people that I hired after I became a supervisor three years ago, we had to go through the dismissal process with her because she just refused to perform even to acceptable levels and it was very unpleasant. And she had a degree.*

> *CC: Almost all of the positions in our department require a degree. But I think you have to go into it looking at what you want because a degree in Anthropology doesn't mean you're an administrator. So if you're looking for someone like that, why not go to a technical school or community college and get somebody who has already committed to that career track? Because those are administration courses, that's what they've taken. They've taken office administration, they know how to write a memo and a letter and those kinds of things, whereas with a degree, you don't do that in a degree.*

These comments reveal another contradiction that supervisors, in-scope or otherwise, often experience. Workers hired into positions they supervise may have the stated qualifications, but if those qualifications do not match with the job tasks, the result can be a mismatch between the person hired and the job. The supervisor is often

the one who must deal with problems resulting from the mismatch, even though it is managers who determine the job qualifications, and often the applicant hired as well.

- Job reclassifications

The position evaluation system was discussed again at the second group interview. It was noted that there was no significant difference in the salaries of one grade level and the next. For example, Bevin explained that when her position was reclassified to a higher grade, it resulted in a net increase of only about forty-five dollars a month. Yet, grade level was noted as an issue of real concern to workers. The participants indicated that some workers saw the grade level of their job as a reflection of the degree to which their work was valued, and that the system created divisions.

> *Bevin: A lot of people look at the grade levels and it's all about if you're a seven versus a nine. It's not that much different in pay...But people, it's all about what level you are. How come that person's an eight and I'm a seven?*
> *Li: That's right. That creates divisions.*
> *Bevin: It really does.*

Even though workers' job performance was not supposed to have any influence on the grade level of their position, it was clear from the research participants' own experiences that it sometimes did.

> *Bevin: Sometimes the job when it's being reclassified is being reclassified because of the person.*
> *Mo: That's basically what happened to me.*
> *Nat: That's very true. I would say that happened to me.*
> *Bevin: Even if on the outside you try not to agree with that, but sometimes it is because for you, you went over and above.*
> *Li: And managers look at you and say, "You're the only one we think can probably do this" but they don't actually come out and say it.*

So given that some positions were reclassified because of the performance of the person holding the position, it was not surprising that some workers did not see a clear distinction between the position evaluation and performance appraisal systems.

It was supervisors who had to try to convince workers that the two systems were not connected, even though practices indicated otherwise.

- Worker retention

The participants saw it as their responsibility to mitigate the problem of losing "good workers," even though this problem stemmed to a large extent from the job classification system and hiring practices. They discussed strategies they used to retain workers.

> *Chris: Make a pleasant work environment. People will be willing to stay in an office where everybody gets along and there's no headaches and, well there are still stresses because of the workload, but if they all get along and they're all happy with each other, they'll be willing to stay in a position longer at the same pay than if they hate coming to work everyday.*
> *Li: And recognize them when they do something well. Make sure they know that. The worst feeling in the world is if you're busting your butt and really doing a good job and no one seems to really tell you...*
> *Chris: You have to be fair too. I mean, everybody has a life outside of work and I think if you're going to be the type of supervisor who says, "You're here at eight, you're here till four. If you're not here you're going to be in trouble and I'm going to be on your back for every minute that you miss." I mean, kids get sick, cars break down, people have other lives. If it goes to the extreme, you're going to have to step in and do something about it, but for the most part if you're willing to give that little bit the employees are willing to give you that back as well.*
> *Li: That's the kind of atmosphere we have where I work, and I think that's why we've had people working so well there for so many years. Because there's trust and also people do their job. People know if they're late for work it isn't going to be the end of the world.*
> *Chris: Yup. And see that comes from the supervisor.*
> *Li: Exactly.*
> *Chris: Because you set the tone in the office and you make it known to the rest of the employees. So if they think that you're looking over...*
> *Li: And you have a collegial atmosphere too.*
> *Chris: Yeah.*
> *Li: It's not like me over you. You know, we're all working here together. This is the work we need to do.*
> *Chris: Exactly.*
> *Li: That kind of approach by a supervisor sometimes makes employees feel a little bit more valued I think.*

The strategies the participants used in an attempt to retain workers (e.g. creating a positive and collegial work environment, recognizing workers for their efforts, treating workers fairly) all focussed on relationship building; specifically, on what they as individuals could do to build positive work relationships with and among workers. No one suggested collective or individual strategies that would challenge the system.

- Perceptions of the union

None of the research participants had ever experienced a worker they supervised making formal a complaint about them to the Public Employees' Union (PEU). However, most perceived that if an employee made such a complaint, the supervisor would receive no support from the PEU.

It was Chris who first raised the question about the PEU's responsibility in supporting in-scope supervisors when they are dealing with problems in the workplace.

> *Chris: When you're in a situation where an employee has actually gone to the union with a grievance or whatever, what does the union do for you then as a supervisor?*
> *Bevin: They don't.*
> *Chris: So where does that put you? That puts you at the mercy of the union and the employee together, right?*
> *Bevin: The question for me is, if you're both in the same union and this person has gone to the union...*
> *Li: Then the union has the responsibility to deal with both of you.*
> *Chris: You're still a member of the union too.*

Chris's question is a very important one – one that I had in mind as I designed this research study. In Chapter 2, I presented arguments posited by those who favour separate bargaining units for supervisors and rank-and-file workers. Mullins (1982), who writes from a union perspective, favours separate bargaining units because unions have a duty to represent all their members and, he argues, if a worker files a grievance against an in-scope supervisor and both seek union support, the union is put

in a very difficult position: "It has a duty of fair representation to all its members, but must breach that duty to one" (p. 219).

I consulted the research participants' collective agreement as well as the PEU and PLI's websites for information about what would happen when an in-scope supervisor was involved in a conflict situation with a worker they supervised, but I found nothing. When Chris asked her question, it was clear to me that no one in the group knew for certain what would happen if one of the workers they supervised went to the PEU with a complaint against the supervisor. Yet their perception was that they would not receive any support from the PEU: this perception contributed to their feelings of being "stuck in the middle."

> *Li: There has to be an employer and there has to be an employee. You can't have this grey middle ground where somebody's in between and they're not really management and they're not really, you know.*
> *Chris: But there is.*
> *Bevin: There is.*

One probable explanation for why the participants were unsure about what would happen to them if an employee filed a grievance against them is because none of them had ever been in such a situation. Bevin said that until I had approached her to participate in the research study, it had "*never entered (her) mind*" what would have happened if she were having a conflict with an employee she supervised and the employee went to the PEU. Chris was the only person in the group who had had a worker complain to the PEU about her. However, in that case the PEU advised the employee that she "*didn't have a case.*" Yet Chris still held the perception "*that when it comes down to the employee going against the supervisor, the supervisor has no support (from the union).*" It was clear that this lack of understanding about how such situations are handled was a source of anxiety for the research participants. However, it is anxiety that could be easily alleviated with more information from the PLI, the

PEU or both. I told the participants my union includes supervisors who are in-scope. In the case of a grievance, the union would represent the employee who filed the grievance and the employer would represent the supervisor because it is assumed that the supervisor was acting in a management capacity and therefore should be supported by the employer. They agreed that this process sounded logical, but were unsure of what would happen to them in a similar situation.

- Summary

The participants identified a number of factors that contributed to their feeling caught in the middle between the workers they supervised and their managers, various organizational structures and practices, and the PEU. Their feelings of being caught in the middle were sometimes based on an experience they had had; for example, Chris's experience of her manager changing a worker's performance rating and Mo's experience of supervising a worker whose qualifications did not match the job. Their feelings were also sometimes based upon their understandings of their workplace and their perceptions; for example, their perception that if a worker they supervised every made a formal complaint to the PEU, they would be "*at the mercy of the union and employee together.*" Clearly, they felt they were limited in how they could deal with many of the factors, such as managers' actions and organizational policies, which contributed to their feeling caught in the middle. At the same time, they accepted it as their responsibility to resolve workers' dissatisfaction. Their strategies focussed on relationship building rather than challenging the system, even though they clearly recognized many of the problems created by the system.

Blurry and shifting work identities

The research participants' location in the organizational structure of the PLI reflects their work identities. Identification can be characterized as "a process of

naming, of placing ourselves in socially constructed categories" (Marshall, 1998, p. 294). The participants did not have a single, coherent work identity. Rather, their work identities shifted. Whether and when they identified with workers or with management, appeared to be linked to their job-related functions, as well as to their employment history with the PLI. Their union status did not appear to play a role in how they identified themselves.

The participants said that they identified with the workers for the following reasons: they were previously rank-and-file workers; as supervisors, they performed some of the same tasks as rank-and-file workers; and they understood the jobs and challenges of rank-and-file workers and perceived that managers did not. However, they said that when they were doing "management work," they identified with management.

> *Researcher: So who do you identify more closely with? In your role as a supervisor, do you identify more closely with management or with the workers?*
> *Mo: The workers.*
> *Li: For me, I'm a worker.*
> *Kim: Yeah. I've done the job before, so I understand where they're coming from and I understand their challenges. Yeah, I would say the workers.*
>
> *Mo: I think most supervisors have done the job of the people they're supervising. And I can't think of a situation where the person you as a supervisor are reporting to has ever done that job. So you're identifying in that respect with your team, and you know what they're having to deal with.*
>
> *Bevin: If the reception is busy and I happen to be walking by, I start helping people...And so I don't see myself as a manager, until it comes to the evaluation which I hate doing anyway. But other than that, you're just trying to make the office run and get the work done. If they're busy, get in there. And that helps.*
> *Mo: We're all part of a team.*
>
> *Chris: You were saying that you probably relate more to the workers. In the situation I was in, I think I related more to management but it's because I was doing all that stuff.*
> *Li: You were managing.*

Chris: Yeah. I just wasn't getting paid for it.

What the above comments reveal is that participants identified at times with rank-and-file workers and at times with management; that is, their identities shifted. Shifts in identities were based on the functions they performed. As well, their identities were shaped by their former experience as rank-and-file workers and by their preference to assume a neutral position (e.g. "*you're just trying to make the office run*," "*We're all part of a team.*").

Perhaps surprisingly, no participants said that they identified with rank-and-file workers because they are fellow union members. However, some perceived that their in-scope status impacted how workers they supervised identified them.

> *Bevin: ...you have situations where you're both in the same union, so you're supervising somebody and that person goes above you and goes to the manager. And then the manager says the same thing you say and they, "Oh, okay."*

As noted previously, the participants' authority is limited by their collective agreement because a member of the PEU cannot discipline another member. Some participants felt that as a result, in-scope supervisors lack credibility in the eyes of some workers. Bevin told the story of an in-scope supervisor in her department whose job was being reclassified to a manager. When the reclassification went through, she would no longer be a member of the PEU. Rather, she would be a member of the managers' union. Bevin felt that rank-and-file workers would then take her more seriously.

> *Bevin: If we end up reclassifying her to a manager position, it's going to make a world of difference. And it's sad that it would, but I think if people realize that she's a manager...she's got a lot of clout even though she's the same person doing the same job. I think it matters, don't you?*
> *Multiple voices: Yeah.*
> *Li: I think that's very important. Yeah, that may be the single most important impact (of being in-scope).*

It is important to note another factor that may impact in-scope supervisors' credibility in the eyes of rank-and-file workers; namely, managers reversing in-scope supervisors' decisions. Bevin described an experience where she was supervising a worker who was asked to take on some extra work because another staff member was ill. Bevin said no but her manager "pulled rank."

> *Bevin: The manager came to me (and said), "Well I'm going over your head." They wanted her to do something and I said, "No, she doesn't have time to do this." (I thought), "Well you go over my head, well then what's the point of me supervising?"*

Bevin further explained that the worker told Bevin that she felt her job was not valued as highly as other staff in the work unit because the work could have been shared. Bevin agreed with her and spoke with the manager but was not able to change the manager's decision.

The literature on supervision of employees (see Chapter 2) states that many supervisors are former rank-and-file workers. It also recognizes that supervisors perform some of the same tasks as rank-and-file workers, as well as some management functions (e.g. leading and controlling). However, the literature unequivocally identifies supervisors as managers. The in-scope supervisors who participated in this study did not identify solely with management; nor did they identify solely with rank-and-file workers. Rather, their work identities shifted and were linked to their employment history and the functions of their positions. It was not linked to their unionized status. Therefore, this study does not support a key argument posited for denying supervisors collective bargaining rights; that is, if they are permitted to unionize, they will see their interests aligned with rank-and-file workers rather than with management and therefore be ineffective in their job performance (see Chapter 2). Except for Li, the participants did not have a strong "union identity"; that is, they did not consciously align themselves with the PEU. I

wonder if that would change for some if they ever become actively involved in the PEU or if they ever seek representation from the PEU in dealing with a conflict between themselves and their managers.

Changing relationships

During both group interviews, the participants spoke about their relationships with the workers they supervised. All but Li had experience supervising former co-workers. Their experience was that their relationships with their former co-workers changed when they became supervisors; specifically, they felt pressured by former co-workers and experienced a distancing in personal relationships.

According to the literature on supervision of employees two of the greatest challenges for supervisors promoted within their work units is coming to terms with no longer being "one of the gang" (Rue and Byars, 1990, p. 10; Sims, et al., 2001, p. 27) and "giving orders to friends or former peers" (Bulin, 1995, p. 8). The participants' experiences reflect these challenges. For example, Kim felt that some of her former co-workers' perceptions and expectations of her changed when she became their supervisor.

> *Kim: My supervisor left...and I eventually moved into her position. So I was overseeing everybody that I had worked with. For the most part, most of them were pretty good about it but there was one in particular who made it very difficult...she definitely tested the limit – tested my boundaries and what I would let her get away with, what was acceptable...my supervisory style is very different from the woman who left. So it was a big," Oh my god." Like they were, "What is this? Like all of the sudden there's these rules that you have put in place and you were just like us at one point so how can you now do this to us?" I suspect they felt I was drunk with power when in fact I was feeling overwhelmed with the scope and responsibility of my position. They just couldn't understand that, so it caused some resentment.*

Nat had similar experience at a job he held prior to working at the Prairie Learning Institute (PLI). His former relationships with the workers there involved a great deal of socializing outside of the workplace.

> *Nat: When I was working in retail...I got bumped up to assistant manager and for quite a long time the manager was gone so I was the manager of this store. And everybody was so happy for me and thought it was the greatest thing because I'd been there for a long time. And when it came time to do evaluations, feedback, scheduling...it turned pretty much into a nightmare...All of the sudden they're trying to pressure me and that's when I started to realize oh, this isn't so good.*

Bevin spoke several times during the two group interviews about a difficult experience she had supervising a former co-worker. After working at the PLI for approximately 20 years, Bevin was hired into a new position within her department to set up and coordinate a new program for some of the department's clients. Bevin described herself as a "*perfectionist.*" She said that she very much wanted the new program she was hired to coordinate to be seen as a success.

> *Bevin: I opened this office. I opened it for the head of my department. It is going to be the best...I don't want to let anybody down. I want it to be so good.*

For the first while, Bevin worked primarily on her own, putting into place policies, procedures, and systems. Once the program was established, Bevin and her manager hired Sheri (not her real name) to work as a program assistant, thus placing Bevin in a supervisory role. Sheri and Bevin were former co-workers and considered each other a friend. Bevin said that once they started working together again, she began to feel tension in their relationship. One of the sources of that tension stemmed from the expectations that Bevin had of Sheri, which she said she later realized were too high.

> *Bevin: It was hard for me because my expectations were way higher than what the position level actually was. So there were problems at the beginning...It was a new position. It is a new office. It's one of those things where you don't realize. I mean, being in the organization for over twenty years you just have a lot more knowledge...I didn't think how much knowledge you would have to have.*

Bevin explained that when she met with Sheri to discuss her performance, "*it all went ka-boom.*" She felt the performance evaluation was fair but Sheri did not. She

said that she saw "*a different side*" to Sheri come out and "*it was ugly.*" Initially, Bevin reacted to the situation by doing some of the work that Sheri was supposed to be doing.

> *Bevin: For me it was almost to the point where, okay forget it...I wasn't trying to get rid of this person, but forget I started any of this. I'll just deal with it on my own and I was starting to do some of the work that she was doing because it was just easier. I'd rather in my mind... just work 'til seven every night. I'd rather do that than the stress.*

The conflict between Bevin and Sheri had a strong emotional impact on Bevin, due in large part to the fact that they were not only former co-workers; they were friends.

> *Bevin: So it's really hard when you really like this person. I haven't had that much experience with supervising and it was like, you can have it. It's really tough.*

> *Bevin: I was her friend...and that's where it made it really hard for me. I was just sick. I mean, I would go home every night because we were having these problems and I was just sick about it.*

The emotional struggle that Bevin experienced appeared to trigger self-examination – questioning how she might be contributing to the tension between her and Sheri. She spoke about "*rethinking the way she was approaching things*" with Sheri; that she realized she was too controlling and needed to give up some of that control.

> *Bevin: You have to look at yourself too and see it's not always just about the person you are supervising. A lot of it comes down to what you're doing as well, your approach...So I changed. It wasn't just about her, like "This is your fault. You're not doing this. You're not doing that." What I did is look at what I was doing and (said to myself), "Okay, stop." You know, if there's a typo on the Excel spreadsheet, oh well! We'll find it eventually.*

The tension between Bevin and Sheri eventually dissipated to the point where, according to Bevin, Sheri was "doing really, really well" and their relationship was

largely restored to its former mutual friendliness although, Bevin added, "*I'm still very careful.*"

> *Bevin: So now, now I've decided that I'm still really nice to her and I still ask her things, but I would never go for coffee, like that kind of stuff. Never be so close to her because it's too hard.*

Embedded in Bevin's story, as well as Kim and Nat's, were feelings of anxiety and isolation – "*I was feeling overwhelmed*," "*I was just sick.*" Their history as former co-workers, coupled with their desire to maintain collegial relationships of solidarity, clashed with their responsibilities of regulation, surveillance, and discipline that supervision in hierarchical structures demands. This clash had an emotional impact, which was intensified when the former co-worker was also a friend and there was a problem with her or his job performance that the supervisor felt needed to be addressed. Chris posited that supervisors "*can't be friends*" with rank-and-file workers because it could lead to the perception that the supervisor was treating one worker better than another because the two are friends.

> *Chris: You can't be friends. You pretty much have to treat everybody the same. So if you're going for coffee with somebody, you go out for coffee with everybody unless it's to discuss something (about work) that's only relevant to that one person. But there will always be that question when there's a promotion or, you know, when somebody doesn't get a promotion, those sorts of things, that it wasn't fair because you're friends with the person that got it. The same with increments and that kind of thing.*

That being said, Chris stated later that the type of relationship that supervisors have with the workers they supervise often depends on the number of worker they supervise.

> *Chris: I think the dynamics really change a lot when there is only one, though because you can have more of a colleague-colleague relationship. Like I found that's what I have and when I was supervising seven... you couldn't have the same sort of relationship. Like the person I have now, we have a very different relationship than if there were seven of her...Even though she's on a lower level and I'm*

> ***supervising her, we have a very different relationship than I did with the seven people I supervised in my former department.***

In my view, Chris's comment reveals the impact of the context on the type of relationships supervisors have with workers they supervise. Chris felt she could be a friend to the one worker she supervised because she did not have to be cautious about their friendship being perceived as favouritism by other workers.

The participants' experiences of supervising former co-workers, some of whom were also friends, reveal the complexity of work relationships; in particular, that relationships between co-workers often changed when one of them moved into a position of power. In addition, an individual's position within the new relationship impacted how they perceive the change. For example, some of Kim's former co-workers perceived that she was "***drunk with power***." Yet she said that she was "***feeling overwhelmed with the scope and responsibility of (her) position***" and perceived that her co-workers were unable to understand her feelings.

Chapter summary

The research findings presented and discussed in this chapter revealed a number of tensions and contradictions experienced by the research participants, which contributed to their feeling "caught in the middle" between workers and managers, organizational structures and practices, and their union. Some were associated with being an in-scope supervisor specifically, while others with being a supervisor in general. Examples of the former included: tacitly accepting some practices that contravened their collective agreement (e.g. not compensating workers for overtime), which created ill-will among the workers that the participants tried to resolve; supporting belonging to the PEU because of the economic benefits (e.g. wages, benefits, job security), but rejecting the idea of being actively involved in the PEU because of the perception that such involvement would incur management resentment

and risk promotion opportunities; the limits the participants' collective agreement put on their authority; worker resentment resulting from inequalities between managers' terms and conditions of employment and their own; and the opposing pulls of solidarity bonds with workers and of roles demanding practices of surveillance, control and discipline. Examples of tensions and contradictions associated with being a supervisor in general included: worker dissatisfaction resulting from managerial decisions that the participants, as supervisors, were required to implement but into which they had very little or no input; losing "good" workers because of mismatches between a job's educational requirements (i.e., a university degree) and it's duties or tasks; and worker resentment resulting from the practice of reclassifying some jobs because of the incumbent's performance.

In addition to revealing tensions and contradictions the participants experienced, the findings exposed some subtle forms of worker discipline and control. These included the "unwritten rule" that if workers want to advance within the organization and be treated with flexibility (e.g. adjust the start and end times of their work day), they must be willing to exceed expectations; in particular, to work overtime without being asked and without expecting compensation. The perception that workers who become active in their union incur the resentment of management and risk opportunities to advance into supervisory or managerial positions is another example of a subtle form of worker discipline and control.

The findings also showed that the participants' identities were linked to their histories as former rank-and-file workers and their job-related functions. They sometimes identified with rank-and-file workers and sometimes with management. Shifts in identities were based on the functions they performed; for example, they indicated that they identified with management when they were doing "management

work" (e.g. worker performance reviews). The primary reason they gave for identifying with workers was their experience as former rank-and-file workers; they had "*done the job before*" and thus understood rank-and-file workers' challenges and feelings. Surprisingly, the participants did not cite being members of the rank-and-file collective bargaining unit as a reason they identified with workers. With the expection of Li, they did not have a strong union identity. On the one hand, they supported belonging to the PEU; however, this support was instrumental rather than ideological. On the other hand, they expressed reluctance about becoming active in the PEU because they felt management would perceive them as aligning themselves with the union, and this would weaken their chances of advancing into management.

Perhaps the reason the participants did not have a strong union identity was because they had had very little contact with the PEU. For example, none of them had ever been involved in a major dispute between the PLI and the PEU, such as a strike. At one point, I asked them think about what they would do in such a situation, although I did not ask them to state whether or not they would cross the picket line. Their comments about what would happen in the event of strike revealed to me a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about how they would act. For example, Mo commented that "*every decision you make is going to cause conflict one way or the other.*" Li was the only one in the group who clearly stated that she would side with the PEU in the event of a strike. What is interesting to note, though, is that the research participants did recognize the power they would have if they acted collectively, that the PLI would "*grind to a halt.*"

The research participants' histories as rank-and-file workers also shaped their relationships with the workers they supervised, some of who were former co-workers as well as friends. The experiences and feelings they shared created bonds of

solidarity. For some of the participants, these bonds were shaken when they became supervisors of former co-workers and when they criticized workers' job performance. At the same time, bonds of solidarity were strengthened by the belief that in-scope supervisors understood the challenges workers faced and the impact that managerial decisions had in the workplace, while managers did not.

One theme arising from the group interviews I did not discuss in this chapter relates to the participants' learning, although I briefly touched on what participants learned. A more thorough discussion of learning is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5
Unpicking the threads of learning

The transcripts of the two group interviews are replete with stories of the research participants' work experiences. Foley (1999c) argues that the "stories people tell of their work experience enable us to understand what they learn in work and how they learn, as well as the significance of their learning" (p. 2). According to Thomas (1985), learning occurs when a person "comes to know something, to be able to do something, or to be able to feel something he or she could not previously" (quoted in Selman, Selman, Cooke and Dampier, 1998, p. 124). In this chapter, I analyze the participants' stories, many of which were discussed in the previous chapter, to show how and what they learned. I also discuss the outcomes of their learning.

I asked the participants only one question about learning, which was how they learned to be an in-scope supervisor. I present and discuss their responses to this question in the next section, but the point I want to stress here is that even though I only asked one specific question about learning, learning is a thread that runs through the research data. Foley (2001) posits that learning is "a complex tapestry, difficult to unpick" (p. 86). I used his framework for analysing learning in social action (see Chapter 3) to "unpick" how and what the participants learned as they worked. His framework provides a sociocultural perspective on learning.

> Sociocultural perspectives understand learning to be fundamentally rooted in activity, tools (including language), relationships, and communities of practice. They look closely at how learning is interrelated with the systems in which people work: the cultural, political, economic and social dynamics of particular groups and contexts. (Fenwick, 2001a, p. 1)

Foley's theoretical framework recognizes that adults learn in a variety of ways – through formal and non-formal education, as well as informally and incidentally. This broad conception of adult learning "draws attention to the widespread and

powerful informal and incidental learning that occurs in workplaces" (Foley, 1999c, p.1). I found that the participants' learning was primarily informal and incidental, embedded in their work activities and relationships.

Foley's framework also recognizes that learning is diverse and complex. As people work, they learn knowledge and skills, and develop understandings of themselves, their relationships, and their workplace. Foley (2001) shows that learning can have contradictory outcomes. It can be positive (e.g. learning that action on a seemingly intractable problems is possible) or negative (e.g. learning to be discouraged or distrustful) (p. 83). It can be productive or reproductive, "both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic" (p. 1).

Learning by doing, talking, observing and reflecting

Foley (1999c) observes that "adult learning constitutes an ensemble of activities" (p. 1), but that most learning that happens in the workplace is informal and incidental, embedded in other activities and often tacit (i.e., not named as learning). He defines informal learning as that which occurs when "people teach and learn from each other naturally and socially in workplaces, families, community organizations and social action" (p. 1), and incidental learning as "learning which occurs as people live, work and engage in social action" (p. 1). An example of informal learning discussed in the previous chapter was Li's experience serving on the PEU executive. An example of incidental learning was Bevin's experience supervising a former co-worker and friend, also discussed in the previous chapter. I analyze what she and other participants learned through their experiences in the following section. The key point of this section is the ways the participants learned were primarily informal and incidental.

I asked the participants *how* they learned to be a supervisor; that is, through what types of activities. I was interested in knowing whether they had any formal or non-formal supervisory training (as in diploma or certificate programs or workshops). Following are their responses to my question.

> *Multiple voices: Trial and error.*
> *Bevin: Unfortunately, but that's...*
> *Li: Experience.*
> *Bevin: It's experience.*
> *Mo: Yes.*
> *Li: And support from other people who are in similar positions.*
> *Nat: Like if you have, or if your supervisor as well...*
> *Li: Being mentored. You know, having people...*
> *Kim: That's right.*
> *Li: ...encourage you and tell you that you can do this work because it can be daunting if you've never done it before.*
> *Kim: And other supervisors I've watched in the past and I work with now. I try to model myself after the bits and pieces that I really appreciate about them.*
> *Nat: And avoid the ones you don't.*
> *Kim: That's right. And listen to my assistants because I ask them for a lot of feedback.*

I asked the participants how they learned to be a supervisor at the end of the second group interview. However, they spoke at other times during both the first and second interviews about how they have learned.

> *Chris: In my department we used to have a group...where all the supervisors within the office met on a monthly basis and kind of aired difficulties and things that were happening, or just things that were happening, not just even necessarily difficulties. And we lost that a few years ago. But I think that sort of thing is really valuable.*
> *Li: I think that's a very good idea.*
> *Bevin: You get a different perspective that way.*
> *Chris: Yeah, it's nice to know that there's people out there that are going through the same thing you're going through and can offer insight.*

> *Bevin: You learn things every day...you're learning every day as long as you're willing to think about those situations on your own, you learn all the time.*

What these and other comments revealed is the participants' learning was predominantly informal and incidental, embedded in other activities and in their

relationships. They learned through doing their work and dealing with work-related problems and challenges; through dialogue with and observation of others, including their managers, workers they supervised and other supervisors; and by reflecting on their experiences. I turn now to a discussion of what the participants learned through their experiences.

The content of participants' learning

According to Foley (2001), what people learn in work is diverse and complex: "The content of learning may be technical (about how to do a particular task); or it may be social, cultural and political (about how people relate to each other in a particular situation, or about what their actual core values are, or about who has power and how they use it)" (p. 1). Through their experiences, the participants developed knowledge and skills related to their supervisory roles, self-awareness, understandings of the complexity of work relationships, and understandings their workplace. I discuss each of these in the remainder of this section.

Learning supervisory knowledge and skills

Through their experiences, the participants developed knowledge and skills related to their supervisory roles. For example, Mo explained that her understanding of how to assess workers' performance and give feedback changed after she came to work at the Prairie Learning Institute (PLI).

> *Mo: ...my manager told me that I had to submit weekly reports on my interaction with her, with the person who was being a problem. And my first weekly report that I submitted she threw back on my desk and said, "You have to re-write this because you're not allowed to compare her to her co-workers. You can only compare her to the job."*
> *Chris: That was one of the things that used to be on the performance appraisal form: When compared to other workers, how do you rate this employee? I don't know if it's still there.*
> *Nat: I think it's gone.*
> *Mo: It's gone...So I had to rethink my entire concept of how people performed because I was doing the comparison thing and...you're not allowed to do that.*

In addition to revealing what she learned, Mo's story highlights one of Foley's key arguments: in order understand learning, it must be connected to the context in which it occurs (Foley, 1999c, p. 3). The participants' conceptions of how to evaluate workers' performance and provide feedback were shaped by the context in which they worked; specifically by the PLI's policies and procedures regarding performance appraisals. If they had worked for an organization where supervisors were permitted or even required to compare workers' job performance, their conceptions would have been different.

Mo spoke of another experience she saw as significant in helping her to develop skills that she utilized in her supervisory role. An interesting point to note about that experience is it did not occur in the workplace.

> *Mo: Well I had a kind of interesting learning experience. I have a seventeen-year old daughter who started going through her teenage things, misbehaving and running away and talking back and deciding we couldn't tell her what to do and all this kind of stuff, when she was about fourteen and it went on for about two years. And in the beginning I kind of didn't want to deal with it because I didn't know what to do.*
> *Chris: That's hard.*
> *Mo: I went for parenting support and that kind of thing and eventually learned that if I didn't confront her the behaviour would just get worse and she would just keep pushing the boundaries even further. And the interesting thing was that I realized pretty quickly after becoming a supervisor that I could adapt those skills to my work. You want to get them the minute they start pushing the boundaries, otherwise they just push them way too far and it's really hard to get them back to this place when they're already gone there.*

Through her parenting support group, Mo developed instrumental knowledge and skills, such as an understanding of the importance of timely and honest communication with her daughter, which she felt benefited her as a supervisor. However, she also learned about the complexities of parent-child relationships, and she drew on the learning gained in her struggle with her daughter to cope with

relational struggles she experienced as an in-scope supervisor. I discuss further in this chapter the participants' learning related to work relationships. What I want to stress here is that Mo's story clearly shows that individuals learn in all aspects of their lives, and they utilize their learning in their many different roles. Her story also reveals the social nature of learning. She said that when her daughter first began to act out, she did not deal with it because she did not know what to do. Through her connections with other parents, she learned strategies to deal with the situation. Her story, along with Chris's comment in the previous section about the value of supervisor meetings that used to be held in her department, point to the importance of providing space for in-scope supervisors to interact with each other. The benefits of such interactions were noted by the participants at the end of both group interviews. For example, Chris commented that listening to the other research participants' stories was a "*real eye opener*" for her. Kim said that she found the group interviews very "*educational*" and Bevin wished they "*could do it more.*" Nat felt "*there really should be some kind of (regular) meeting for in-scope supervisors.*"

Developing self-awareness

Through their experiences, the participants developed self-awareness. Bevin's story of supervising a former co-worker and friend, discussed in Chapter 4, is an example of such learning. She learned that being in a leadership position does not mean one has all the knowledge and workers have none to contribute.

> *Bevin: You have to be open to grow...just because you're a supervisor doesn't mean you have all the answers and understanding of the way it is.*

By being reflective and reflexive – that is, turning back her experience on herself (Steier, 1991, p.2) – Bevin learned that her expectations of Sheri were unfair because they were beyond what should be expected given the grade level of the

Sheri's position. She also learned that she was "*too controlling*" – but that was not because she perceived Sheri lacked the ability to do the job, nor because she had a desire for power. For example, at one point she used the phrase "*my staff*" and quickly added, "*Let me rephrase, I don't like using 'my staff'*." She also said that it really bothered her when Sheri referred to herself as Bevin's "*assistant.*" Rather, it seemed to me that she was controlling because she had a strong desire that the new program she was hired to coordinate be seen as a success and she perceived herself as personally responsible for its success. It appeared that Bevin also perceived the conflict with Sheri as personal failing that she was eventually able to "fix" through learning to let go of some control and recognizing that she "*doesn't...have all the answers.*" However, Bevin is caught in a paradox. On the one hand, she sees herself and Sheri as personal friends, as "team members" with shared experiences. On the other hand, she has assumed a role within the workplace that requires her to scrutinize and control Sheri's work and act as disciplinarian. Bevin accepted this dual responsibility unquestioningly. However, when "*it all went ka-boom*" Bevin questioned herself rather than questioning the system; for example, the "unwritten rule" that workers are expected to exceed their stated expectations if they want to advance within the workplace. While Bevin's learning helped to resolve the interpersonal conflict between her and Sheri, it was reproductive. Systemic problems continue to be conveyed as individual or interpersonal problems, and the belief that individuals are responsible for resolving these problems by regulating their own attitudes and responses is maintained.

Learning about work relationships

Through her experience with Sheri, Bevin not only gained self-awareness; she also learned about the complexities of work relationships. For example, she learned

that others sometimes perceived her actions and words much differently than she intended them. She said she takes a great deal of pride in her work so she always tries to do her best but others "*think that you're a controlling witch sometimes.*" This recalls Kim's story (see Chapter 4) about how her relationship with her former co-workers changed when she moved into a supervisory position. She said that she suspected they felt that she was "*drunk with power*" when really she was "*feeling overwhelmed*" with the responsibility of her new position. Her experience shows that power relationships shape people's perceptions. Kim shared another story that speaks to this point.

> *Kim: One of my earliest lessons in our department came when I was the receptionist covering for a maternity leave. At the time there were two associate directors. Let's call one good and one evil. The good one was exactly that. He would do his own photocopying. He'd do his own faxing. He was always willing to pitch in. And the other one, because I was a lowly receptionist, he would literally drop things on my desk and say, "Type this out for me." And you know, it would take him more time to say fax this for me than to actually do it himself. So I said that I would never do that to anybody ever in my life. I would be the type of supervisor who'd get in there and do the work too.*

When the "evil" manager used his positional power in a demoralizing manner, Kim felt resentment and acrimony. These emotions and the learning embedded in her experience, shaped the type of supervisor that she became – one who would never consciously abuse the power that came with her position. Nat's story of his supervisor purposely taken credit for the work he had done, which I discussed in Chapter 4, is an example of similar learning. Having someone else take credit for one's work can be very demoralizing, particularly if that someone happened to be a person in a position of power and trust. Nat had that experience. He knew what it felt like and the learning embedded in that experience played a role in shaping the type of supervisor he became.

Chris said that shortly after she became a supervisor she learned that one way to establish and maintain positive relationships with workers is by being flexible with rules.

> *Chris: ...there's a tendency when you first start supervising to be very rule bound...I learned I guess fairly early on that people have other lives...and that you can't always fit into the nine to five block. It just doesn't work. So...I started giving some leeway to people when things came up, you know. Even if it was a dog or cat...I had a supervisor who could have cared less.*

Chris's comments reveal an understanding of the impact that a supervisor's actions can have on working relationships. Chris and the other participants felt that by creating a "*pleasant work environment*," recognizing workers' contributions, and treating workers with fairness and respect, they can mitigate some of the effects of problems that stem from organizational structures and practices, such as the practice of understating the education and training required for a job in order to keep the job's grade level and salary low. As noted in the previous strategies, all of these actions focus on relationship building, rather than challenging the system in which they work. That being said, the participants did understand many of the problems of their workplace.

Developing understandings of the workplace

Through their experiences, the participants developed potentially powerful understandings of their workplace. For example, they learned that one of the "unwritten rules" of their workplace was workers are expected not only to meet the performance expectations set out for them, but to exceed those expectations. Further, those workers who exceeded expectations – in particular, who were willing to work overtime without being compensated – increased their chances of advancing within the PLI and were treated with more flexibility than workers who did not work "off the clock." They learned about problems with the PLI's worker performance assessment

and job evaluation systems; for example, that the words they must use to rate workers' performance are problematic and that the practice of inflating the educational requirements for a position can result in a mismatch between the position and person hired for the job. They also learned about inequalities between managers' terms and conditions of employment and rank-and-file workers', the latter of which are the same as their own.

All of these understandings are potentially powerful in that they can be used to challenge the system and gain more control of the labour process (Foley, 1999c, p. 15). However, the participants' actions appeared to contradict their learning and reproduce the system. For example, they understood that workers have commitments and priorities outside of work and that workers should not be penalized for not exceeding expectations, which tended to be framed as working overtime without being compensated. At the same time, they appeared to believe that working "off the clock" was largely a matter of personal choice. Even though the unwritten rule of expecting workers to exceed expectations contravened their collective agreement and created divisiveness, some appeared to accept it, perhaps in part because it reflected their own experience. Therefore, despite their understandings, their uncritical acceptance of this unwritten rule perpetuated and reproduced what I consider an unfair labour practice.

Outcomes of learning

Not all learning is "inevitably triumphant" (Fenwick, 2001b, p. 41). One of Foley's key points is that learning can have contradictory outcomes. For example, Bevin said of her experience supervising a former co-worker and friend that she became cautious in her relationship with Sheri: "*I'm always on guard.*" On the one hand, her learning that her expectations of Sheri were unfair and that she tended to be

overly controlling brought about a change in her way of thinking and approach to her relationship with Sheri.

> *Bevin: Every time she has a small question, like a doubt, she comes and asks me. She's one of these who ask all the time. So before that was not taking ownership. Now I see it as whatever you can do and feel comfortable, and then the questions that you have, just come and ask me. It doesn't matter.*

On the other hand, she learned to be wary in her relationship with Sheri, which in my view further isolates her in the workplace.

A clear example of non-salutary learning is Chris's experience, described in the previous chapter, when she gave a worker she supervised an unsatisfactory performance rating and her manager changed it without consulting her so that the worker would receive her annual increment. Chris was frustrated because she had decided the initial rating with her manager. She said that the manager "*came off looking like the good person*" and she as "*the bad supervisor*." I asked her what she did in that situation and she responded, "*Well you started to learn not to put anything (negative) in the performance appraisal.*" As noted in the previous chapter, one problem with performance assessment identified by Chris and the other participants was some supervisors and managers did not take the process seriously. They shared stories of supervising workers whom they perceived did not perform their jobs satisfactorily yet their previous supervisor had given them satisfactory appraisals. Not surprisingly, when they tried to address the performance issues with those workers, they were met with resistance because what the workers were hearing from them contradicted what they had heard from their previous supervisors. The participants acknowledge that such situations were not only difficult for them as supervisors, but also unfair to workers. What Chris learned when her manager changed the worker's performance rating from unsatisfactory to satisfactory without consulting her was thus

repressive and reproductive. Her learning "*not to put anything (negative) in the performance appraisal*" perpetuated a problem the participants themselves identified.

Chapter Summary

The experiences shared by the research participants showed that much learning that happens in the workplace is informal and incidental, embedded in other activities and relationship. Their stories also revealed the diverse and complex nature of learning that occurs as people work and live. Much of the participants' learning was social; for example, they learned about the complexity of work relationships. Through their experiences they also developed supervisory knowledge and skills, gained self-awareness as they struggled to deal with daily problems, and developed potential powerful understandings of their workplace. Their understandings of systemic problems was potentially powerful in that they could have used their learning to challenge the system; however, what I found was that the outcomes of their learning tended to reproduce the systems in which they worked. Specifically, they saw it as their responsibility to resolve problems created by various organizational structures and practices by changing their attitudes and beliefs and through relationship building with the workers they supervised.

Chapter 6
Final thoughts

This study, exploring in-scope supervisors' work and work-related learning experiences, represents the first major research project I have undertaken. As noted in Chapter 1, I brought to it several years of supervisory experience and a strong commitment to unionization. Through my interactions with the research participants and analysis of the data, my understandings and appreciation of the unique and inherently conflicting position inhabited by in-scope supervisors were greatly enhanced. During the writing of this thesis, ideas for other research studies occurred to me, along with practical suggestions for unions and managers. These are presented in this chapter as recommendations for further research and recommendations for practice. First, however, I present a summary of the research.

Summary of the research

The six in-scope supervisors who participated in the research worked for a large public sector organization in the Province of Alberta and belonged to the same union. Most of the data for the study was collected through two loosely structured group interviews with the participants. Their collective agreement, as well as policy and procedure documents located on their employer and union's website, also served as data for this study. At the first group interview, short scenes from four popular films were shown to stimulate dialogue and surface issues and themes related to being a supervisor in general, and an in-scope supervisor in particular. Both group interviews were transcribed by me and validated by the research participants.

Data analysis involved both an interpretive and a critical reading of the data. The interpretive method described by Ely (1991) was used to identify categories and generate themes emerging from the data. The data was then read from a critical social theory perspective, in particular Foley's theoretical framework for analysing learning

in social action (see Foley, 1999b and 2001), in order to understand how various structures and relationships shaped the participants' identity and learning.

I discovered that the position of in-scope supervisor contains a number of tensions and contradictions. For example, on the one hand the participants supported being unionized because of the economic benefits. On the other hand, they were reluctant about becoming active in their union because they felt they would be perceived by management as aligning themselves with the union against management, and would therefore risk opportunities to move into a management position. I also found that the participants often felt caught in the middle between workers and management. These feelings resulted from a number of structural and relational factors, such as being required to implement managerial decisions unpopular with workers and with which they often disagreed. I found that participants' identities were shaped by the tasks they performed and by their histories as former rank-and-file workers; I did not find that it was shaped by their union status. In terms of learning, I found that most of the participants' learning was informal and incidental, embedded in their work activities and relationships. Their learning was also complex and contradictory, and while potentially powerful, it tended to reproduce the system in which they worked.

Recommendations for further research

The in-scope supervisors who participated in this study had never been involved in a major dispute between their employer and their union. A research study involving in-scope supervisors who had participated in a strike, for example, could uncover additional tensions and contradictions associated with occupying leadership positions while belonging to rank-and-file collective bargaining units. Questions for such a study could include: What do in-scope supervisors involved in a labour strike

learn from their experience in the dispute? What factors do they consider in deciding whether to join their fellow union members in the strike or, conversely, to cross the picket line? In what ways do their beliefs and understandings of their union and their employer change as a result of their involvement? How doe a strike affect supervisor's relationships with rank-and-file workers and managers? How might it shape their identities?

These research questions could be explored through open-ended individual interviews with in-scope supervisors. Individual interviews with one or more of the workers the research participants supervised and with their manager at the time of the strike would be useful in exploring the question about how work relationships were impacted by the strike. Finally, for background information, it would be helpful to talk to union officials and management representatives involved in the strike for their perspectives on the main issues of the dispute. Differences and similarities in the perspectives of the union, management, and in-scope supervisors could be explored.

A second set of questions for further research would ask who benefits most from supervisors being in-scope. Does management benefit more than the union from supervisors being in-scope or vice versa? In what ways do management and the union benefit? What are the disadvantages of supervisors being in-scope from both a management and union perspective? These questions could be explored from the perspectives managers and union officials, as well as in-scope supervisors. For example, what do they perceive as the benefits and drawbacks of being in-scope?

The methods used to pursue the above questions could include a combination of surveys and interviews. The surveys could be used to solicit union officials', managers', and in-scope supervisors' opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of supervisors being in-scope. An example of a question is: Do you

believe that in-scope supervisors can be committed to both their employer and their union? Interviews with union officials, managers, and in-scope supervisors could focus on specific situations where in-scope supervisors were involved in a disagreement between the union and management (e.g. collective bargaining issues or a grievance).

To explore further in-scope supervisors' learning, a third recommendation for further research would involve a critical incident method (see Brookfield, 1994 and 1995). Bevin's story about the struggle she had with the worker she supervised, who was a former peer and a friend, is an example of a learning experience that could be explored using the critical incident method. What and how she learned, as well what knowledge, skills and supports that would have been helpful to her in dealing with the situation, could be identified through such an approach.

A final recommendation for further research would explore the question: What does it mean to be a member of a union? This study would involve both union members who were active in their union and ones who had never been active, as well as union officials. It would explore perceptions and beliefs not only about the rights and benefits that come with belonging to a union, but also about members' obligations and responsibilities as union members. As noted in Chapter 4, I attempted to find an answer to this last question by researching the labour studies literature and the websites of major unions, but I failed to find any information. I also asked the question during the second group interview; only one of the research participants responded.

Group interviews, possibly followed by individual interviews, would be an interesting way to approach such questions. The interviews could include not only in-scope supervisors, but rank-and-file workers as well. The data could be analysed for

differences and similarities between the perspectives of the individuals involved in the study, as well as for factors that might account for any differences and similarities identified.

Recommendations for practice

Several recommendations for practice can be drawn from the research findings. My first recommendation concerns employee performance assessment. During both group interviews, the research participants expressed concern about the Prairie Learning Institute's (PLI) performance assessment system and practices. Their major concerns appeared to be with the rating system they are required to use (i.e., unsatisfactory, satisfactory, very good or excellent) and with performance increments (specifically, that it was difficult both to deny a worker an annual increment and to reward a worker more than a single increment). For organizations with similar systems and practices, I recommend an external review, which would include ample participation by supervisors, workers and managers. If the workplace is unionized and if any policies and procedures governing performance assessment are included in the collective agreement(s), I further recommend that the review be co-sponsored by the union and the employer. The specific questions this review might address are: 1) What are the benefits and drawbacks of rating employees' performance and 2) what are the benefits and drawbacks of de-linking pay and performance?

My second recommendation stems from the participants' lack of awareness and feelings of anxiety about what happens to in-scope supervisors when a worker they supervise makes a formal complaint about them to their union. The participants perceived that in such a situation they would be "at the mercy" of the union and the worker; however, none were certain about how they would be impacted because they had never experienced such a situation. I was unable to find any information in the

participants' collective agreement, on the PLI's website, or on the Public Employees Union's (PEU) website to answer their question. I recommend that in workplaces where supervisors are in-scope, the employer support in-scope supervisors in a dispute involving them, a worker and the union. I recommend further that this policy be made clear to all in-scope supervisors to alleviate some of the anxiety caused by uncertainty.

My third recommendation for practice is specifically for unions. This study found that at least some union members perceive that if they become active in their union, they will incur the resentment of management and harm their chances of advancing within the workplace. As noted in Chapter 4, this perception is not in the interest of unions because having active members is a way to build the union. It is also not in the interest of union members because they lose out on opportunities to learn with and from each other and to participate in democratic decision-making. Regardless of whether this perception is "real" or not, I recommend that unions endeavour to educate their members about the benefits – individual and collective – of being active in their union.

My final and primary recommendation for practice is that space be provided for in-scope supervisors to learn with and from each other. A few months after the second group interview I contacted the research participants and asked them if their participation in the study had had any impact on them. Three responded; following are their responses to my question.

> *Li: It certainly gave me some food for thought. It has helped me to more readily recognize behaviours in the relationship(s) between supervisors and staff. And the group discussion was very, very educational. It is a really good idea to have this kind of roundtable discussion where you get a chance to hear other people's experiences in the workplace, as they can be so varied.*

Mo: It helped me to know that there are others out there who were having similar experiences to my own and that I wasn't alone. It definitely gave me a forum to relate to. Also, I discussed some of the generalities...that came out of this with my manager and found her to be extremely receptive to some of the difficulties I had been experiencing.

Nat: I believe it did. In fact, I have become more aware of in-scope supervision throughout the organization, which was a concept I never gave any attention to before. I have become more reflexive in my supervisory approach, considering that I, myself, am an in-scope supervisor. I have become more aware of boundaries and better understand what value in-scope supervisors can contribute to the people they supervise. I also believe that this issue should be discussed within organizations and that there might be a need to form some sort of network for these types of positions.

The research participants expressed similar sentiments about their participation in the research during the group interviews.

Kim: It's been very reassuring since I have the least amount of experience in this group. So it's given me lots of food for thought.

Chris: One of the things that I found really valuable, and I didn't think that I would find this valuable, is to get out of the office. You look at things differently. Like when you start to see how the rest of the world sees things and not just how your little part of the world sees. It's really been an eye opener for me.
Kim: It's been educational for me.
Bevin: I wish we could do it more.
Nat: Ever since our last meeting I've been thinking that there really should be some kind of meeting for in-scope supervisors.
Li: Yeah. Why hasn't anybody though about it before?

These comments indicate that the in-scope supervisors who took part in the study benefited not only in terms of learning, but also in making social and emotional connections with other in-scope supervisors. Embedded in their stories were feelings of isolation. In my view, the chance to dialogue with others in similar situations helped them realize that they were not alone. Therefore, I recommend that more opportunities be provided for supervisors to interact with one another. That said, Chris commented that some supervisors might be reluctant to discuss problems they are having with others because they might feel the problems reflect poorly on them – that

they are not "good" supervisors. Therefore, a safe learning environment would need to be created and maintained so that supervisors feel they can freely discuss problems they are experiencing and that there will not be any negative consequences.

This raises the question of if and how the employer and union should be involved in assisting in-scope supervisors. My recommendation is for the employer or the union or both to sponsor training for in-scope supervisors on action research. Action research is comprised of activities that form a cycle. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) name these activities planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cycle often repeats itself. Planning, acting, observing and reflecting lead to more planning, acting, observing and reflecting, and so on. Action research training could be provided by an "outside" adult educator (i.e., some one who works neither for the employer nor the union). Once in-scope supervisors understand the methods of action research, they could form action research groups that collaboratively identify problems in their daily work lives and plan, try out and evaluate solutions. Of course, managers must provide in-scope supervisors with the time they would need for these action research groups to meet on a regular basis. In my view, this recommendation would not only provide in-scope supervisors with valuable learning and opportunities to make social connections, but it would also give them a measure of control over their own learning.

Personal reflections

As noted in this chapter's introductory comments, this study is the first major research project I have undertaken. Not surprisingly, throughout the process of designing the study, collecting and analysing the data, and writing the thesis, I questioned what I was doing and how I was doing it. For example, I struggled with my primary research question: What are the work and work-related learning

experiences of in-scope supervisors? At times the question seemed almost too broad, particularly when it came to organizing and categorizing the data, and presenting the findings. However, I believe now that the question generated very rich data and encouraged me to keep an open mind and look for possibilities I had not considered given my own experiences and biases.

I also questioned myself about using loosely structured group interviews as the method for collecting the data. I wondered, for example, whether I should have asked the group specific questions about the film scenes rather than leaving it to participants to begin the discussion after we watched each scene. While this structured approach might have made data categorization easier, it may have occluded issues that were important to the participants.

The most significant issue I grappled with during the research study relates to the respect and admiration I have for the research participants. As I noted in Chapter 2, I personally knew two of them prior to the study. I continue to maintain social contact with them, and have developed a social relationship with another. I have questioned my bias in interpreting and presenting the data because I found myself wanting to portray them in a positive light. Analysing their experiences from a critical perspective was particularly difficult because I did not want to offend any of them; further, it would be presumptuous of me to criticize their beliefs, perspectives, decisions, and actions. Rather, my intention has been to provide a critical analysis of the system in which they work; to show, for example, some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in occupying a position within the workplace that demands practices of surveillance, control and discipline of workers with whom one shares similar experiences, feelings, and bonds of solidarity. It was very clear to me that the six in-scope supervisors who participated in this study desired to be perceived by the

workers they supervised as "good" people. As Bevin commented, when you treat workers with fairness and respect "*they'll always (think), 'When I become a supervisor, I'm going to be just like her!'*"

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Appendix A
Film scripts

Film: *Office Space*

Scene:

The scene takes place in the restaurant between this waitress (Joanna) and her supervisor (Stan). Stan calls aside Joanna aside to talk about her "flair," the pins and buttons that the serving staff wear on their uniforms.

Stan: *Joanna, could you come here a minute please?*
Joanna: *Yeah.* (Walks over to supervisor*) I'm sorry I was late. I was, uh, having lunch and I, umm...*
Stan: *We need to talk about your flair.* (Claps his hands together.)
Joanna: *Really? I have fifteen pieces on. I, uh…* (Points out the pins and buttons on the front and back of her uniform.)
Stan: *Well, okay. Fifteen is the minimum. Okay?*
Joanna: *Oh, okay.*
Stan: *Now, you know, it's up to you whether or not you want to just do the bare minimum or...well...like Brian, for example,* (points to a waiter talking to a table of customers in a very animated way) *has thirty-seven pieces of flair on today, okay? And a terrific smile.*
Joanna: *Hmm.* (Nods.) *Okay, so you want me to wear more?*
Stan: (Sighing.) *Look, Joanne?*
Joanna: *Yeah?*
Stan: *People can get a cheeseburger anywhere, okay? They come to Chachkees for the atmosphere and the attitude.*
Joanna: (Nods.)
Stan: *Okay, that's what the flair's about. It's about fun.*
Joanna: *Yeah. Okay, so more then, yeah?*
Stan: (Looking exasperated.) *Look, we want you to express yourself. Okay?*
Joanna: (Nodding but also starting to look exasperated).
Stan: *Now if you feel that the bare minimum is enough, then okay. But some people choose to wear more and we encourage that. Okay?*
Joanna: (Nodding)
Stan: *You do want to express yourself, don't you?*
Joanna: *Yeah.*
Stan: *Okay, great, great. That's all I ask.*
Joanna: *Okay.* (Walks away.)

Film: *Norma Rae*

Scenes:

This scene takes place in the mill. A co-worker comes over to Norma Rae who is working at a machine and motions to her that the plant manager wants to see her.
Norma Rae: *I already told him I wouldn't go out to dinner with him. What's he want now?*
Co-worker: *Maybe he wants to make you breakfast Norma Rae.*

Norma Rae: (Walking into the plant manager's office). *Whatever it is, I didn't do it.*
Plant manager: *Norma Rae you have the biggest mouth in this mill. Give us a longer break. Give us more smoking time. Give us a Kotex pad machine.*
Norma Rae: *Do it and I'll shut up.*
Plant manager: *Well we'll do better than that. We figured the only way to close that mouth is to hand you a promotion. You're going up in the world honey.*
Norma Rae: *Yeah? How far and for how much?*
Plant manager: *Well, we're gonna put you on spot checking.*
(Pause.)
Norma Rae: (Looking sceptical.) *Well hell, it sure ain't going to make me any friends. Plant manager: It will make you another dollar and a half an hour.*
(Norma Rae takes the clipboard the manager hands her and leaves the office. The next three scenes show her timing workers as they work. The following exchange takes place as she is timing an older worker – her father – who is replacing spools on a machine.)
Father: *How am I doing little girl?*
Norma Rae: (Smiling.) *You're doing good daddy.* (Pause.) *I think you better try to speed it up some if you can.*
Father: (Scowling.) *I'm going as fast as I can.*
Norma Rae: *Yeah.* (Pause.) *Well they're watching me. They're watching you.*
(Fast forward to next scene.)
Norma Rae arrives for work and says good morning to some of the workers only to be ignored by them. She becomes increasingly upset and asks one of the workers, *"What the hell is going on around here?"* When she gets no response from him she says, *"Hey, I'm talking to you."* He looks at her and replies, *"Fink."* She replies, *"Well shit"* and storms into the plant manager's office.
Norma Rae: *Nobody out there is talking to me.*
Plant manager: *Less talk, more work.*
Norma Rae: *Yeah, well they're my friends and they're going to stay my friends. I'm quitting. I'm quitting right here and I'm quitting right now. You're speeding them up so you can weed them out.*
Plant manager: *You knew all that.*
(Pause.)
Norma Rae: *Yeah. Well I was greedy and I was dumb. And I'm sorry so you can just go ahead and fire me.*
Plant manager: *No, we won't do that. We'll put you back to work in the weaving room, Norma. You're family has been with mill a long time.*
Norma Rae slams down her clipboard and leaves the office. She goes back to work at one of the machines. A couple of her co-workers smile at her and one ties an apron around her waist. Norma Rae smiles.

Film: *Bread and Roses*

Scene:

This scene takes place in the workplace just after Perez, the supervisor who is also of Mexican or Latin American decent, has berated the workers for having a meeting in the workplace with an organizer from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). As Perez order the janitors back to work, he calls one of them (Berta) aside. The following exchange takes place:

Perez: *Three and a half floors. It's brutal. Takes it out of you.*
Berta: (Nods.)
Perez: *How would like a vacation? Would you like that?*
Berta: *Sure, I'd like that.*
Perez: *Take a week off? Everything paid for.*
Berta: (Smiling.) *Yes.*
Perez: *$12.50 an hour.*
Berta: *Oh, that's nice.*
Perez: *Sounds good?*
Berta: *Yes, sounds good.*
Perez: *With insurance.*
Berta: *That's too?*
Perez: *Yes. We have new contracts. And we're gonna be very busy. I'm going to need people, people I can trust. A lot of confidence. How would you like to be a supervisor?*
Berta: *Me?*
Perez: *Yes.*
Berta: *That would be cool. I'd try to do it as best as I can.*
Perez: *You've been here a long time.*
Berta: *Yes.*
Perez: *How many years?*
Berta: *Seventeen years here.*
Perez: *And do you think you could be a supervisor?*
Berta: *Yes, I could do it.*
Perez: *Good. That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.*
Berta: *Thank you.* (Gets up to leave).
Perez: *Berta? Sit down again.* (Berta sits down.) *One thing.* (Pause.) *Who organized the meeting?*
(Berta shrugs.)
Perez: *Who was it, Berta?* (Pause.) *Do you know?*
(Berta shakes her head.)
Perez: (Pause.) *Can you tell me who it was?*
(Berta shrugs, shakes her head, and looks down at her hands.)

Film: *9 to 5*

Scenes:

In the first scene, Violet is meeting with Frank Hart in his office. The following exchange takes place:

Frank: *Yeah, what else.*
Violet: *Did you have a chance to look at the report I did on the colour coding of accounts?* (Frank looks up at her with a puzzled look on his face.) *Last month, I gave it to you. It could improve efficiency by up to twenty percent...*
Frank: (Leans back in chair).) *Oh yeah, well, colour coding. Sure I looked into that but that needs a little work. I mean, I'm going to have to get back to you on that. Yep. Mmmhmm.* (Focusing intently on a paper he is holding) *Okay.* (Waves Violet out of

his office.As she leaves the office, he looks at her out of the corner of his eye with a suspicious look on his face.)
(In the hallway, Violet runs into a co-worker (Roz) just in front of the elevators.)
Roz: *Oh Violet, I haven't heard from you. Did you get my memo?*
Violet: *I did Roz. I tore right through it.*
Roz: *Good. You know we must clamp down hard on any signs of unionization. Oh, here comes Mr. Hart with Mr. Hinkle.*
Frank: (Talking to Mr. Hinkle, the president of the company, as they walk towards the elevator.) *Coming from you, of course, that means a lot to me.*
Hinkle: *Well I mean it.* (Notices Violet and Roz.) *Hello girls, how's it going?*
Violet: (Smiling.) Just fine sir.
Roz: (Smiling.) *Hello Mr. Hinkle.*
Hinkle: *Roz you'll be getting a copy of this report Frank just gave me.* (Looks at Hart and smiles.) *We are going to start colour coding the accounts from now on. Frank has done a brilliant study of its efficiency.*
(Violet's smile fades and she looks stunned.)
Frank: (Smiling and bowing to Hinkle.) *Well thank you sir.*
Roz: *Really? Congratulations Mr. Hart.*
Frank: *Thank you Roz.* (The two men step into the elevator.)
Hinkle: *Just, just brilliant. You're a fine piece of manpower, Frank. Any other reforms you want to make down here are fine with me.*
Frank: *Well thank you...*
Hinkle: *This is your floor. You run it as you please.* (Turns to Roz and Violet.) *Going up girls?*
Violet: (As the elevator doors close in her face.) *No, we're going down.*

Appendix C
Information letter

Dear prospective research participant:

My name is Joan Schiebelbein. I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The focus of my degree is in adult education. I have a particular interest in workplace learning. One of the requirements of my master's degree is the completion of a thesis. For this, I have chosen to conduct research on experiences of in-scope supervisors. In particular, I want to understand the tensions and contradictions in-scope supervisors experience as a result of being in a leadership position within the workplace, while at the same time being a member of the same union as those whom they supervise. In addition to my thesis, the data I gather may be used for other purposes, such as articles written for scholarly publications and/or papers presented at academic conferences. All uses of the data gathered during this study will be handled in compliance with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants (see http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html).

I am seeking six in-scope supervisors to participate in this study. Each participant will be asked to participate in two group discussions, both of which will be audio taped. At the first meeting, we will view and discuss selected scenes from popular movies that depict interactions between supervisors and supervisees. The second meeting will take place after each participant has had the opportunity to review the transcript from the first meeting. At the second meeting, we will identify and further discuss the key points and themes from the first meeting. Finally, I may meet with each participant individually after the second meeting if further information is required. Individual meetings will also be audio taped. All participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts of both group meetings and their individual meeting with me, if applicable, in order to correct or clarify any comments they made, and to add further comments should they so choose.

I anticipate that each group meeting will last two to three hours (refreshments will be provided). Participants will receive the transcript of the first group discussion within two weeks of the meeting. The second meeting will be schedule two to three weeks after that to give time for participants to validate the transcript of the first meeting. The transcript for the second group discussion will be provided to participants within two weeks of the second meeting and participants will have two weeks to validate and return the meeting transcript to me. Individual meetings, if required, will be scheduled three to four weeks after the second group meeting. Participants who participated in an individual meeting will be asked to validate the meeting transcript within two weeks of receiving it.

Before you agree to participate in this study, you should be aware of any reasonably foreseeable harms and benefits that may arise from your participation. With respect to the former, you or others (e.g. workers you supervise, your union or your employer) could experience harm in the event that something you said in confidence was disclosed to someone not involved in the study. The probability of harm to you or others will be minimized by requiring all research participants to sign the Participant Consent Agreement (attached), which includes a statement that confidentiality is a

Appendix E
Participant information form

Name:

Unit:

Job Title:

Age:

Highest level of education (Note: If you have a certificate, diploma or degree, please specify the area of study.):

How long have you worked at (name of employer)?

How long have you been a supervisor at (name of employer)?

Did you previously work in a non-supervisory position in your unit (i.e., the unit in which you are a supervisor)?

How many positions report to you?

In total, how many individuals have your supervised during your employment at (name of employer)?

In total, how many individuals have you supervised during both your employment at (name of employer) and with other organizations?

Have you ever supervised someone who was formerly a peer (i.e., you both worked in a non-supervisory position)?

Appendix F
Group Interview Questions

What issues and questions are raised in the film scenes related to being a supervisor in general, and in ain-scope supervisor in particular?

As an in-scope supervisor, do you identify more closely with management or the workers you supervise?

Is it easier to be a supervisor in a non-unionized workplace or a unionized workplace? Why?

As an in-scope supervisor, do you find the collective agreement helpful to you in performing your job or a hindrance?

Would your job be easier if you were out of scope - if you were either a member of a different bargaining unit than the workers you supervise or not a member of the union at all?

Your collective agreement limits your authority because you cannot discipline another PEU member. Do you see this as a good thing or a bad thing?

Can in-scope supervisors be active in their union? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what does it mean to be a member of a union in terms of your responsibilities and obligations?

Have you had experience supervising former co-workers or friends? What was that like?

Do you feel that you changed when you moved from a non-supervisory to a supervisory role in your workplace? In what ways did you change?

How did you learn to become an in-scope supervisor?